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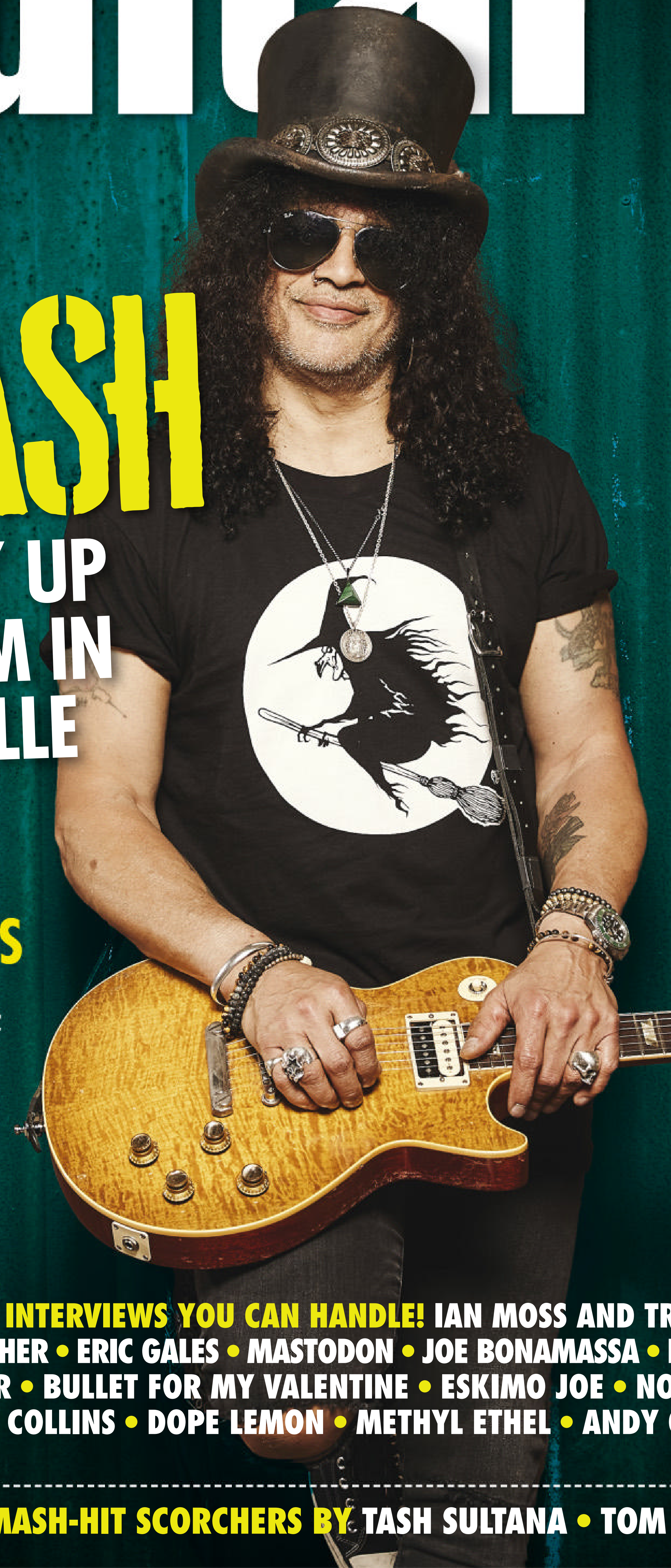

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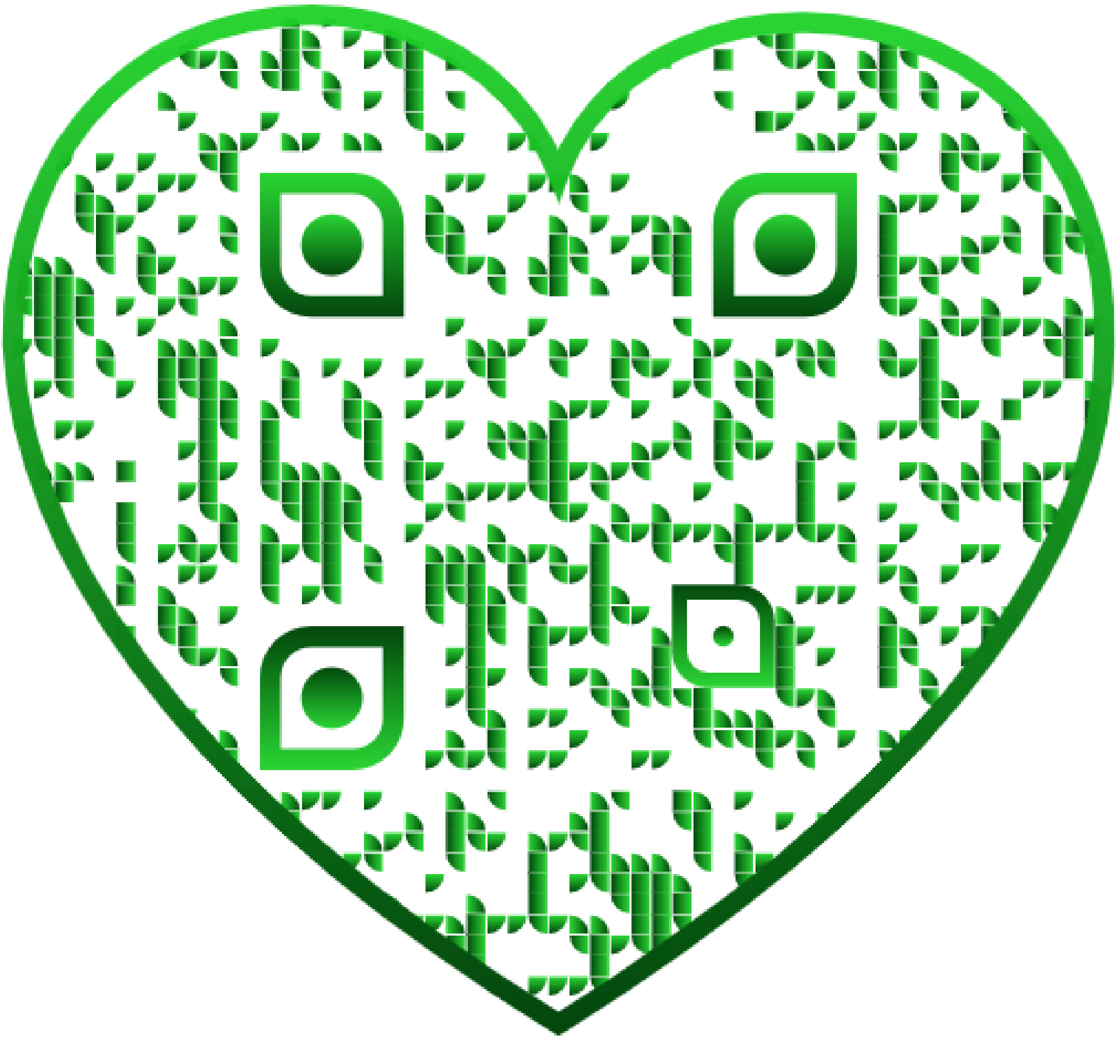

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# CONTENTS

## INTERVIEWS


**10** Ian Moss and Troy Cassar-Daley
**11** Eskimo Joe
**12** Wolfmother
**13** Dope Lemon
**14** Methyl Ethel
**15** Andy Golledge
**16** Charlie Collins
**19** Northlane
**20** Bodyjar
**21** PLANET
**22** Black Label Society
**23** Bullet For My Valentine
**24** Mastodon
**25** Eric Gales
**26** Joe Bonamassa

**28 Cover Story: Slash**

## REGULARS


**04** News
**06** Spotlight
**08** CD Reviews
**76** Hot Gear →
**81** Studio Tips

## FEATURES


**48** Ten Essential Gibson SG Albums
**50** Africa's Guitar God
**52** How Orange Reinvigorated The Amp Game
**54** A Guitarist's Guide To The Bass
**61** The Astronaut That Made Music In Microgravity
**64** The Six-String Legacy Of R.E.M.
**70** Shootout: Best Acoustic Guitars And Gear
**82** Five Tears For Fears Songs Every Producer Should Know
**98** Final Note: We Need To Talk About Boomer Bends

## REVIEWS


**84** Focusrite Clarett+ 2Pre • Focusrite FAST Verb
**86** Lehle Dual Expression Pedal
**87** Vox Mini Go 50
**88** Sterling By Music Man Cutlass Short Scale HS
**89** Fender Acoustasonic Player Telecaster
**90** Fender Tone Master Super Reverb
**91** Fender Kurt Cobain Jag-Stang • Ashdown Pro-FX Two-Band Boost
**92** Epiphone USA Casino
**93** Gibson Generation G-00 + G-200
**94** Electro-Harmonix Ripped Speaker + Nano Deluxe Memory Man
**95** Boss IR-200 Amp & IR Cabinet
**96** Cort Core-OC Series
**97** Blackstar Dept. 10 Dual Drive + Dual Distortion


## TECHNIQUE


**34** Tablature: Passenger
**36** Tablature: Tom Petty
**38** Tablature: Tash Sultana
**42** Lesson: Open Powerchords
**44** Lesson: Alternate Picking
**46** Lesson: Consolidated 9ths
**72** DIY: Mismatched Pickups

# BEHRINGER EMULATES CLASSIC MU-TRON TONES WITH OCTAVE DIVIDER

Behringer has unveiled the Octave Divider, which it claims is a faithfully spec'd clone of Mu-Tron's own '70s-era rare octave modulation pedal. Suitable for electric guitars, bass guitars and keyboards, the affordable pedal sets its sights on supplying genuine Mu-Tron-style tones in the form of "thunderous sub-octave growl".

A quick visual appraisal will tell you all you need to know about Behringer's neat new offering. The control layout is a like-for-like replica of the original Mu-Tron, presented in an ever-so-slightly more streamlined package. Two knobs, Mix and Tone, line up alongside three switches for Power, Ringer and Stabilize. While the Ringer function places greater emphasis on upper harmonics, the Stabilize parameter is said to improve note tracking with monophonic signal sources. And you already know what Power does.

There are two switches on the Octave Divider – Effect and Bass Only – the first of which engages the pedal. The second, meanwhile, cuts your dry sound completely, leaving you with just the saturated, sub-octave-laden signal. In terms of connectivity, the pedal features a jack instrument Input, as well as Amp and Aux outputs. It should come as no surprise, either, that these three connections are also found on the original Mu-Tron.

***Words by Matt Owen***

# PRINCE WILLAM FANCIES A BIT OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

With such decorum and public composure, it's hard to imagine members of the British royal family listening to hype music. And if such an imagination can be conjured, they're surely listening to some spritely orchestral composition, right?

Wrong. Prince William, grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, listens to rock music – specifically AC/DC – to get himself ready for his royal duties, as he explains in a new episode of Apple's *Time To Walk* podcast. "There's nothing better than, on a Monday morning, when you're a bit bleary-eyed after the weekend and trying to get yourself back into the grind of the week, listening to AC/DC, 'Thunderstruck'," the Duke of Cambridge said on a stroll round the Queen's Sandringham estate.

"I have to say the first time I put it on – and I've heard it a million times now – I was kind of, like, 'Well, this is quite heavy for a Monday morning. But now, when I listen to it, it's the best tonic for a Monday morning. It absolutely wakes you up, puts your week in the best mood possible, and you feel like you can take on anything and anyone. I'd imagine you're going to walk quite fast listening to it, maybe with a skip in your step, with the headbanging. It's a difficult song not to dance to or to nod along to."

***Words by Sam Roche***

# MEGADETH MINT THEIR OWN CRYPTO

Megadeth have launched $MEGA, their own cryptocurrency which offers special perks and benefits to fans who buy, hold and trade with it. Announcing the new digital coin on Facebook, the band wrote: "By buying, holding, and transacting with $MEGA, fans will gain access to exclusives and premium benefits." In addition, members of Megadeth's official fan club (the Cyber Army) that hold $MEGA will unlock "additional exclusives, access, and offers", starting with free $MEGA.

The thrash-metallers jumped on the crypto train for the first time earlier this year when they sold their first NFT – a digital work of art entitled Vic Rattlehead: Genesis – for 8.4 Ethereum, roughly $18,000 at the time. While many musical artists have bought into the NFT hype – including Joe Bonamassa, Yngwie Malmsteen and Muse's Matt Bellamy – Megadeth join a small list of musical artists who are using the world of crypto to offer real-world utility to fans.

Megadeth are currently gearing up to release their 16th studio album – *The Sick, The Dying And The Dead* – in 2022. We've yet to hear any official music, but band leader Dave Mustaine has shared two audio snippets in Cameo videos to fans. Back in August, James LoMenzo was announced as the band's new live bassist, following the departure of longtime bass player David Ellefson.

***Words by Sam Roche***

AUSTRALIAN guitar™

#146

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FUTURE

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Photo: Madeleine Keinonen

## BEN SPEIGHT

**HAILS FROM** BRISBANE, QLD
**PLAYS IN** FUTURE HAUNTS
**SOUNDS LIKE** SOARING INDIE-ROCK WITH A BRITPOP FLAIR
**LATEST DROP** I CAN'T CHANGE THE WAY YOU CHANGE (EP OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

**What's your current go-to guitar?**
Japanese Fender Jazzmaster. I'll admit I saw Tom playing Jazzmasters in his other band Good Boy and just loved the look and sound so got myself one - haven't looked back. It's a modern one but it just plays so well and stays in shape easily, every other Jazzmaster I've picked up just doesn't feel right to me. It's got a really thin neck, I've replaced the pickups with Lollars (JM neck, P-90 bridge) and it just goes hard.

**How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?**
I absolutely hated guitar when I first was forced to learn it through primary school - I think there was a really bad teacher who just couldn't deal well with kids at all! But I picked it up again in high school because sport really wasn't my thing, learnt on my Dad's old acoustic and just kept begging for an electric. Finally the old man caved and took me round to about 50 shops in Brissy to get one - it was some type of Ibanez, back then they were running hot in the entry level market and there wasn't too much else around that looked good to me. I don't actually have it any more come to think of it, pretty sure I lent it to my cousin and haven't seen it again!

**What inspires you as a player?**
I grew up with a lot of 2000s indie and rock, so I think my playing style kind of naturally defaulted to a lot of power chords and bridge pickup drive. But since playing in Future Haunts I've made a conscious effort to play differently, use different pickups and basically undo a lot of the style ingrained through my formative years. Tom was a huge influence there, teaching me all these jazz chords and weird stuff that still doesn't make much sense to me, but it sounds alright so I'll stick with it!

**Are you much of a gear nerd?**
Not really a huge gear nerd. I mean I've got a fair few pedals lying around collecting dust, mainly used for studio stuff but don't really make it onto my board. But not really into the ultra boutique-y kinda gear, sometimes the simple stuff just works well, and plus that stuff's too expensive! Favourite pedals are the good old Crowther Hotcake, Tym Savage Toecutter Deluxe and MXR reverb gets a lot of use. Amps we gravitate to Fender stuff, hotrod deluxe or deluxe reverb reissue.

**Do you have any 'white whales'?**
Absolutely would love a custom made Shub guitar. Jon Shub in Melbourne who plays in the band Gold Class makes them and they're just downright sexy and exactly what I want in a guitar. One day...

**What would your signature model look like?**
As above, the Shub would scratch the itch. But I think another option would be having a Mustang with a Jazzmaster vibrato system. For me, Mustang vibratos always go out of tune after using them no matter how well it's set up (maybe I just play them wrong!). I actually bought one of the newer cheap Mustangs and fitted a jazzmaster trem myself, so I kinda got there but my dodgy craftsmanship can't match someone who knows what they're doing!

**If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...**
I reckon John Lennon or George Harrison would be a good pick. Simple but oh so effective and some of the melodies and hooks they've written are just next level. I'm more into guitarists who write good songs and know when to serve the song rather than anyone who's technically fast or complex.

Photo: Liam Davidson

## MITCH PARRY

**HAILS FROM** MELBOURNE, VIC
**PLAYS** LOOSE END
**SOUNDS LIKE** A VICIOUS BLEND OF METALCORE AND POP
**LATEST DROP** "AUTOPILOT" (SINGLE OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

**What's your current go-to guitar?**
My current go-to guitar as of late has been my Fender special edition custom telecaster FMT HH. I have had this guy for the last two years and have played every show this year with it. I have played Schecter guitars for so long I wanted something different and have always loved a Tele but wanted something with humbuckers. I came across the FMT HH on the fender website and had my heart set on it, I had to get my local guitar shop to order one in because they were near impossible to find in Australia at the time and after a three-month wait I had it in my hands.

**How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?**
I was a very late bloomer when it comes to guitar, I didn't start playing until I was around 15/16 years old. My friend sent me a few Bullet For My Valentine songs via Bluetooth (that's how long ago we are talking) and I would listen to them every single day walking to and from school playing air guitar dreaming of one day being able to play. My dad took me to Cranbourne music and I got an Epiphone Special Les Paul 2 as my first guitar. My next guitar was my B-stock Schecter Damien elite avenger which I have played for the best part of ten years live, that one is still my baby and the guitar I really learnt how to play on. That guitar was shipped in from America as damaged stock for extremely cheap and it has never let me down, it's the only guitar I will never depart with.

**What inspires you as a player?**
I don't have a lot of influences so to speak, my guitar playing was built from bands like Rise Against, Alter Bridge and Metallica which I would listen to on repeat as a teenager. These days I don't really have influences I just love music and take parts of absolutely everything I listen to from pop to death metal. It all subconsciously influences me and I never realise until I pick up my guitar.

**Are you much of a gear nerd?**
I was never much of a gear nerd, my set up for a long time was a Marshall JVM410h with a Boss tuner and a noise gate. I am a very keep it simple kind of guy, the less stuff I have the less can go wrong in a live setting was always my mentality and its always worked for me so I have just always kept it that way. During covid I have recently upgraded to a Kemper which I'm extremely excited to play live one day!

**Do you have any 'white whales'?**
As a teenager I always dreamed one day of owning Michael Paget from Bullet For My Valentine's custom Jackson but that has quickly vanished, I would love to own a beautiful Gretsch or PRS one day... But to be honest I love my guitars and am lucky enough to own a few now which I adore and still get excited to pick up.

**What would your signature model look like?**
This is such a hard question to answer, I'm a little out there in terms of my personality so id love that to come across on the guitar. I think a simple Telecaster cut but being fluorescent yellow or orange with fishman fluence modern pickups. 25.5-inch scale with a thin neck and an ebony fretboard either completely blanked out or an inlay just on the 12th fret. Lock in tuners.

**If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...**
I'd love to play with Mark Knopler from Dire Straits. This is the band my dad forced me to listen to as a kid and I absolutely adore them, heck I'd be happy to just sit in the same room and just watch him play. His finger picking style is something I have always aspired to mimic.

Photo: Sammy Pearson

# PSYCHOBABEL

**HAILS FROM** MELBOURNE, VIC
**THE MEMBERS WE INTERVIEWED ARE** LEAH ROMERO, MATT FORGE AND STU FERGUSON
**SOUNDS LIKE** PUNKY AND PROGGY, BAROQUE-ISH GARAGE-ROCK
**LATEST DROP** "GRIP" (SINGLE OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

### What's your current go-to guitar?

**Romero:** A 1992 Japanese Fender Mustang. The short scale and super light feel makes it very comfortable to play live.
**Forge:** A Telecaster copy I built from scratch. I love it for its mahogany body, caddy green nitro finish and '70s Seymour Duncan P-90 Dog Ear on the neck.
**Ferguson:** A Japanese Rickenbacker knock-off from the '70s. Having only played short-scale basses, I love how it feels like a double bass and affects the way I play.

### How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

**Romero:** My first guitar was a non-branded, nylon-string classical guitar that I got when I was eight years old. I started to play because I had no friends.
**Forge:** I grew up in a pretty isolated area without much to do, and my cousin started learning AC/DC songs. I simply wouldn't allow him to know how to do something I couldn't. My first axe was a handmade Japanese Yari nylon with Brazilian rosewood back and sides, and a warm cedar top from '65 that my Aunty had passed down to me in my early teens.

### What inspires you as a player?

**Forge:** I've always loved the fluidity and otherwordly sounds that Hendrix paints, and the sophisticated, yet eerie note choices of the two-fingered, lightning fast Django Reinhardt. Not to mention Josh Homme's raw desert-psych tones and songwriting style, and the general approach all three have to the guitar.

### Are you much of a gear nerd?

**Romero:** I like having gear that I'm definitely going to use. Stu and I both play Death By Audio fuzz pedals (Apocalypse and Fuzz War), and I think that has become a big part of our sound.
**Forge:** I am the biggest gear nerd. Lately I've been enjoying my housemate's '63 Fender Vibroverb amp. With only 600 ever made, it was the first Fender amp to feature a vibrato system (actually taken from a Hammond organ circuit at the time) and has such piercing clarity and breakup. I can now clearly see why it was the touring choice of the late Stevie Ray Vaughan.

### Do you have any 'white whales'?

**Forge:** An ES-335 with PAFs is my personal vision of the perfect tone, but I love really weird, kooky vintage guitars from the '60s that make me question the designer's abstinence from psychedelics at the time.

### What would your signature model look like?

**Romero:** Matt is actually entertaining the ridiculous idea of making me a Dungeons And Dragons-themed guitar with armour on the body and D20s as pots.
**Forge:** I've worked as a luthier at Maton for years, and have always dreamt about us one day doing a reissue of the Firebird. As long as we would adhere to only the best quality components – as we always do – and maybe a baseball bat-like neck and hot-as-hell pickups, I'd be happy.

### If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive…

**Romero:** Our music is pretty heavily influenced by the Arctic Monkeys, so I reckon writing a song with Alex Turner sounds like a fun time.
Forge: Hendrix would have to be my number one dream jam companion, as he would be for many other guitarists. I'd say just having Mitch Mitchell hold a groove and wail on endlessly to Neptune and back.
**Ferguson:** Given all these lockdowns, I think I'd just like to play with the guitarists of Psychobabel again whenever we can.

Photo: Deadend Visuals

# WILL WRIGHT

**HAILS FROM** ADELAIDE, SA
**PLAYS** CHOOSING SIDES
**SOUNDS LIKE** SCREAMING, SUN-KISSED ROCK 'N' ROLL
**LATEST DROP** *ALL I NEED* (EP OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

### What's your current go-to guitar?

As a band we are massive lovers of Fender Telecasters, originally both playing them in our early days, they really shaped our sound. In the past year or so I decided to take on a Jazzmaster project guitar which was sculpted to compliment Michael's lead guitar tones. It was super tricky to source guitar parts throughout the pandemic, but I think I ended up making something really unique. I decided to swap out the humbucker setup that came with the body to put in a really smooth Lollar JM style pickup in the neck position and a P90 style pickup in the bridge. We love Tele's because of how versatile they are and how their purely simple design compliments our way of making music.

### How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?

My parents actually tried to get my brother to play guitar, but he didn't really align with the world of stringed instruments (he's now the band's drummer). I took his acoustic guitar and started playing along to my favourite songs at the time and have never looked back. I now own about 10 guitars and have an addiction that will never go away.

### What inspires you as a player?

I really love the riffy rhythm tones that Alex Turner uses throughout the different stages of the Arctic Monkeys discography. I tend to base my tone off of a bunch of UK indie rock bands including the likes of Catfish And The Bottlemen and Foals.

### Are you much of a gear nerd?

We both revolve our tones around Vox AC30 and AC15 amps. The chimey and bright tones are super ideal for our style of music and allow riffs and lead lines to really cut through a mix. My personal favourite pedal is the ProCo Rat because it's the gnarliest, but must malleable distortion pedal I've ever used. It is perfect for our heavier sounds, but also works amazingly after an overdrive to add a bit more crunch.

### Do you have any 'white whales'?

I would love to get my hands on a Sunn Model T amplifier because they have such a thick sustain sound and they are nearly impossible to find.

### What would your signature model look like?

I'd go with a white thinline Fender Jazzmaster with a white pearl pickguard, black knobs and hardware. With a '58-style JM pickup in the neck position and a P-90 in the bridge position. I love being able to have the balance between the smooth and mellow tones of the JM neck sounds whilst having the raunchy aggression of a P-90.

### If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive…

If I could jam with any guitarist, I would definitely choose Jimmy Page. He's an absolute legend of the instrument and has had such a massive effect on modern rock music. It would be incredible to hear the secrets behind his tones and his way of writing riffs and licks.licks.

# TOP PICK

## MITSKI

### Laurel Hell

DEAD OCEANS

There is no grunge-soaked moment of catharsis like 'Your Best American Girl' on *Laurel Hell*; the closest we get is a crashing mid-song climax on 'There's Nothing Left For You'. There's no disco-pop twirling like 'Nobody', either, but 'Love Me More', echoing New Order, almost takes us there. Here, Mitski takes the up-tempo pop sensibilities of her 2018 album, *Be The Cowboy*, and stretches them to fun tunes influenced by full-blown '80s pop ballads and grandiosity. The conceptual themes of *Be The Cowboy* – narrative and fiction, embodying strutting characters – are gone. Instead, Mitski has turned inward, refusing to wear more masks that hide her personality.

Of course, some moments don't quite work; moments that might as well be an awkward '80s pop music pastiche – the bassline and bridge from 'Should've Been Me' could be ripped from 'Maneater' by Hall And Oates; the opening melody to 'Stay Soft' forces us to hear 'Come On Eileen' against our will. In addition to the strange imitations, the downtrodden synth-based songs (ie. 'Everyone', 'I Guess', 'That's Our Lamp' and 'Valentine, Texas') sound half-baked. The unfinished nature of the songs is odd considering that Mitski and her longtime collaborator, Patrick Hyland, have never spent so long working on an album. I wish that the guitar was her primary instrument again; Mitski excels at punchy, intense rock songs far more than throwing in a keyboard here and there.

There is, of course, plenty that does work on *Laurel Hell*: the entirety of 'Love Me More', 'The Only Heartbreaker', and 'Working For The Knife'; random piano lines that are reminiscent of 'Dancing Queen', great production, Mitski's voice and, as always, her powerful lyrics. 'Should've Been Me' imagines infidelity from the POV of a loving relationship, the vibrant sound almost blocking out the lines, *"When I saw the girl looked just like me, I thought, 'must be lonely loving someone trying to find their way out of a maze.'"* Meanwhile, the outstanding 'Working For The Knife' details the tension she has faced since becoming an indie-rock sensation: *"I used to think I'd be done by 20 / Now at 29 the road ahead appears the same. Though maybe at 30, I'll see a way to change that I'm living for the knife."*

If only the rest of *Laurel Hell* contained that same energy; knowing Mitski's musical and lyrical capabilities and hearing her come up short is beyond disappointing. Oh well, at least we will always have *Puberty 2*.

**WORDS: MARY VARVARIS**

## GREATEST HITS

### Volume Two

LEMON JOE

Gold Coast/British group Greatest Hits have fashion. You can feel style all over their new EP, *Volume Two* (you don't need to guess the title of their first EP). 15 minutes of funk, psych-rock, and chill sensations make this collection of songs fly by in no time. The sunny 'Pleasure To Meet You' meets David Bowie's 'Ashes To Ashes', while the dreamy 'Nuclear Love' is backed by catchy bass riffs and an excellent refrain that encourages your sickest dance moves. However, 'Banana Moon' doesn't fare as well; it's a bore. 'Palm Springs' is similarly snoozy. Thankfully, 'Spicy' is an exuberant pop tune made for high rotation. Overall, *Volume Two* is fun, albeit unmemorable.

## KORN

### Requiem

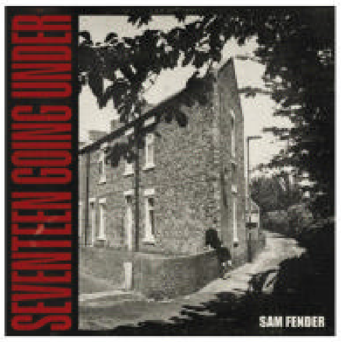
LOMA VISTA / CONCORD

Korn have been on a hot streak since releasing the familiar *Paradigm Shift* in 2013. Its follow-up album, 2015's *The Serenity Of Suffering*, proved that the Californian nu-metal group had more to prove. In 2019, Korn released their 13th studio album, *The Nothing*, which this writer would argue was their best album yet. *The Nothing* excelled at exploring new and old dynamics and themes of pain. Their 14th album, *Requiem*, stretches the signature sound of Korn as we know it. Filled with gritty guitars and filthy breakdowns, Jonathan Davis spits out brutal screams after unsettling croons and surging melodies; the band finds light amidst the darkness. While we miss the cold electronics from their previous release, Korn has added another solid, heavy funk album to their repertoire.

## SAM FENDER

### Seventeen Going Under

POLYDOR / UNIVERSAL




Sam Fender's debut album, *Hypersonic Missiles*, was packed with unorthodox love songs and autobiographical stories focused on his working-class origins. *Seventeen Going Under* takes those motifs and transforms them into something life-affirming. Fender's voice soars atop triumphant guitar, keyboard, and saxophone licks, taking cues from Bruce Springsteen and Jeff Buckley. Fender tells stories about supporting his mother following her fibromyalgia diagnosis, coming of age in seedy pubs, and the alienation towards left-wing politicians and pundits. Yet, he somehow finds time to celebrate life and overcome hardships between the angst. This'll be declared a classic album someday, with its bright mix, nostalgic sound, and evocative storytelling.

## SPOON

### Lucifer On The Sofa

MATADOR

Spoon, with their best band lineup yet – guitarists Alex Fischel and Gerardo Larios, plus bassist Ben Trokan joining founding frontman Britt Daniel and drummer Jim Eno – have delivered an album (almost) as clever in sound as it is in title. Following 2017's enthralling *Hot Thoughts*, with its added drum machines and synths, the Texas group opted to simplify the method for *Lucifer On The Sofa*. Opener 'Held' (a Smog cover) and 'The Hardest Cut' accentuate a swaggering classic rock sound. The album is full of slinky, desert rock riffs, surprising turns towards stoner rock and balladry, and an undeniable feeling of defiant optimism. No one is keeping Spoon or Lucifer on the sofa.

## TOTALLY UNICORN

### High Spirits//Low Life

FARMER & THE OWL / BMG

Totally Unicorn quickly made a name for themselves thanks to their raucous and unpredictable gigs across Australia. With support slots for Frenzal Rhomb, Violent Soho and Tonight Alive, the Wollongong outfit can convert casual punk listeners into full-blown fans. Of course, with the name Totally Unicorn, this reviewer didn't expect heavy music – we didn't know *what* to expect, quite frankly. The band is fun, for sure. Their third album, *High Spirits//Low Life*, is filled to the brim with humour, wicked riffs and celebrating what makes life great: being with our friends. The band take cheeky stabs at tinfoil hat-wearing conspiracists and trust-fund kids, surrounding vocalist Drew Gardiner's yelps with down-tuned mosh-ready riffs. This summer, you will want to headbang to Totally Unicorn.

## ZEAL & ARDOR

### Self-Titled

MVKA

Zeal & Ardor made waves en masse with their second album, *Stranger Fruit*. It received critical acclaim from virtually everywhere, proclaiming it to be one of the best records of 2018 (they also got shout outs from genre mainstay Dani Filth in multiple interviews). The band's blend of black metal with traditional gospel music makes for an addictive, highly unusual, yet wholly genuine style. This self-titled effort brings back the blues, pummelling breakdowns, and Manuel Gagneux's vicious screams. Zeal & Ardor remain enraged. Not only that, but by combining English and German-sung songs, protest ('Bow'), and questioning metal music as we know it, the band excel at bringing listeners into their darkly bizarre world.

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# THE DYNAMIC DUO

THIS MARCH, TWO OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST ICONIC SONGWRITERS – **IAN MOSS** AND **TROY CASSAR-DALEY** – WILL HIT THE ROAD FOR A SPRAWLING ACOUSTIC TOUR, BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO EACH OTHER'S CLASSIC SONGS.

WORDS BY **ANNA ROSE** AND **MATT DORIA**.
PHOTO BY **ROBERT HAMBLING**.

Anyone for tennis? Well, not quite, but two of Australia's all-time guitar greats are up for a match of sorts next March. Ian Moss and Troy Cassar-Daley are heading out on one hell of a tour, buddying up for a collaborative venture dubbed *Together Alone*. The 17-date run will see both musicians onstage simultaneously; as Ian performs one of his songs, Troy will perform harmonies and accompanying vocals - and vice versa - drawing on some of the pair's best-known songs, past and present… And future, too.

Nestled in the pair's set will be an all-new song, 'Nullarbor Plain', which the pair worked on and performed for Moss' as-yet-unannounced eighth studio album. The whole album is, in fact, the result of Mossy getting "stuck into it" during our numerous lockdowns, with the Cold Chisel string slayer already hard at work in the studio. And, 30 years deep into his career, Cassar-Daley also a firm grip on some new music, dropping his 13th full-length effort, *The World Today*, last March.

*Together Alone* is an opportunity that only fans of both artists will enjoy - with the creative calibration of two very different catalogues in full force - but, as the pair tell *Australian Guitar*, it's also an opportunity for both Moss and Cassar-Daley to fully appreciate the calibre of one another's skill, up close and personal.

**Let's go back to day one: where did the concept for this tour come from?**

**Troy:** We've been friends for a long time, and I think one day we just sat down and went, "Y'know, it'd be great to be able to put something together!" We did a recording years and years ago, when Nash Chambers and I were making a record full of these great old cover songs, and Ian kindly came up to sing on a song called 'Dark End Of The Street' by Dan Penn. It just sounded really natural, where country met soul. So we looked back on that particular recording and went, "Y'know what? This would be nice to take on the road." Because we spend so much time by ourselves doing acoustic things, it's really good for us to have someone else to bounce off.

**So are you both performing together, or will the show be split into separate sets?**

**Ian:** We've already done one show in Grafton, Troy's hometown, just to try out the format - and we were really, really happy with it. We're onstage all night together, and what we're doing is just going song for song, backing each other with vocals and a bit of guitar work or whatever. But mainly, it's each guy supporting the other when it's their turn to do a song and tell a story. And that's the beauty of it, y'know - there's lots of great stories behind these songs, and I think people are enjoying that aspect just as much as the music itself.

**Are you able to shake things up every night, or because you have to learn each other's songs, are you playing to a rigid setlist for the whole run?**

**Ian:** Well, whether it's our show or any show, you put a lot of work and thought into the order of the songs - there's more than one way to skin a cat, but y'know, we put a tonne of work into the setlist we played in Grafton, and that worked a treat, so I think we're going to stick with that until… Well, at least until we get sick of it. It's going to be brand new to whoever sees us every night, so it's not going to matter to the audience so much.

**Troy:** I think it'll probably depend on the audience too, y'know, the fact that they all respond differently. I love the way that set flowed. It felt really, really natural. And from one song to the next, when Ian was singing on my stuff, it felt like we'd been playing together for years. When the first show of any tour goes as seamlessly as that, I'm inclined to leave it be and let it do its thing.

**Have you found that with each other's support, the songs are taking on a new life?**

**Ian:** Absolutely. Even if it's just spurred on by the fact that we both love an opportunity to have a little go at a solo here and there. That's a whole different kettle of fish when you're on your own, it's not easy to branch off to do single-note stuff. So from that aspect, it's fantastic - one of us can strum chords and the other can just let rip and have fun.

**Troy:** We try to sort of build everything around what we do separately, but it's those little things that you add on that make a difference. I mean, Ian sometimes sings on things that I normally don't even hear a harmony on, and that, to me, is what makes the show special. Because it just takes the songs up another notch every time you hear them.

**Well you actually have a bunch of new songs to play, with *The World Today* coming out last March. Are there any tracks from that sprinkled in the set?**

**Troy:** Yeah, we're playing a couple of those, and some other more recent ones. There's one song called 'Shadows On The Hill' that Ian adds this whole other dimension to, and that really blows my mind. I'd normally play it on acoustic guitar, but because I've got another very adequate guitar player next to me, I actually play the banjo on that one. That makes a huge difference to the texture of the song, because it's actually played like it was recorded. I bet you never thought you'd go to an Ian Moss show and see a banjo - we've pushed the limits a bit here! I think where it crosses over is with Ian's beautiful tenor soul voice.

**Ian:** And y'know, there's not a lot of distance between country and the blues. That's one of the reasons I'm loving working with Troy, is that with everything he does, he's got this great bluesiness - even when he sings a straight-out country song, there's still this real heartfelt blues element to it.

**Have you made any progress on your next solo album, Ian?**

**Ian:** I have actually, yeah. I got stuck into it during lockdown - in fact if it wasn't for lockdown, I may not have gotten these songs ready. But I started recording just two weeks ago, and I've got a whole bunch of rhythm tracks down already. There's a lot of work left to do with guitar and vocal overdubs, but there's been impact! There's a song that Troy and I wrote together, 'Nullarbor Plain', which we're doing in the set. It's a good, solid four-on-the-floor rocker.

**Has anyone broached the idea of a collaborative full-length?**

**Ian:** Not yet, but I think we're going to end up with a great live album, at least. We'll get a few shows under our belt and sort something out. We'll probably just record all of them - these days, it's so easy to record things half decently, and there's only two musicians onstage, so there's no reason why we can't get a great recording every night. I'm sure we'll end up doing that, then sit down at some stage and pick the best recording.

# 25 YEARS OF HITS

IN A QUARTER OF A CENTURY, **ESKIMO JOE** HAVE GIVEN US MORE THAN OUR FAIR SHARE OF ALT-ROCK ANTHEMS. NOW, THE PERTHIAN POWERHOUSE ARE BUNDLING THEM ALL INTO ONE NEAT LITTLE PACKAGE, *THE WORLD REPEATS ITSELF SOMEHOW*.

WORDS BY **ANNA ROSE** AND **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **JARRAD SENG.**

To say Eskimo Joe are a staple in Australian music would be like saying bacon comes from a pig. With a fresh collection of some of their most prevailing songs, *The World Repeats Itself Somehow*, the band haven't just dropped a "greatest hits" album, they've taken the time to cultivate an anthology of music that serves as a reminder of their sonic capabilities, and the persuasive power their music has to draw in the masses. The choices made for the release makes it something cathartic for the legendary WA rockers, and provides their fans an opportunity to sink their teeth into some rose-tinted gold.

Scoring accolades upon accolades, Eskimo Joe have always hit top marks with their music. With their stellar single 'Black Fingernails, Red Wine' nestled firmly in the ARIA Top 50 chart for 62 weeks, and the *Inshalla* cut 'Foreign Land' winning APRA Awards for Most Played Rock Song On Australian Radio and Best Rock Song Of 2010 – to mention just a few of their seemingly unlimited trophies – Eskimo Joe, as approved by their peers and listeners, know how to write good music.

2020 saw the release of 'Say Something', Eskimo Joe's first taste of new music in eight years. The riveting and electric song saw the band refreshed, emerging from the shadows with a track that couldn't have been timelier, and proved another moment in the band's 30-plus years where a buzz had been created – one that will likely be celebrated and welcomed again in the future. The world repeats itself, indeed.

**What's it been like going through the catalogue and charting 23 years of creative growth?**

It's been a really fun process. We'd re-released all of our older records as anniversary editions, and that was a really fun process, going through all those b-sides. But then having to pick a single collection of songs to represent our entire career... It was actually quite a challenge! Because y'know, we've all got our personal favourites, but realistically, this record is about what other people want to hear.

**When you have all the records stacked up like that, do you see how much you've grown as a guitarist, and all the new skills you'd picked up throughout the years?**

For sure, yeah. It's interesting – I've always seen myself more as a songwriter, rather than a guitarist, but I guess as you create more music and you play more live, you start to understand the instrument a lot better. It starts to feel more natural, y'know? You become more of a guitarist as you play more guitar. I know that's a pretty obvious statement, but I don't know... It's a mindset.

I think it really is a mindset – some days you feel it, and some days you don't. But those those nights where you just get onstage and the adrenaline flows through you, it's... It's like you're driving the best car you've ever driven. It's so seamless and effortless, and it feels amazing. Those are the great moments.

**As a guitarist, do you aim to increase your skillset, or push yourself further out of your comfort zone with each new release?**

No. I'm not a very technical guitarist – I firmly believe that the song tells you what to play, and you can't tell the song what you're going to play. Sometimes you'll create a little masterpiece of your own and show it to the other guys, and they'll go, "That's f***ing awesome, but it's not right." And you're like, "Yeah, that's fair enough." But for me, how you express those notes as a guitarist, that's the key. It's not about fitting in as many as I can, or trying to find a new technique or effect to squeeze in. It's about saying, "Okay, what's the best way to showcase this melody, or this part, or this section?"

For example, the last record we did [Wastelands], there wasn't a lot of guitar on it. We just went synth crazy, and there's only one guitar track that was actually plugged into an amp – the rest was just DI and effects and weird synths. So it's been an interesting journey with the guitar, but it's my first love, and I'll always come back to it. I do love those moments where, y'know, you maybe haven't picked up the guitar for a few weeks, but then you grab it and all of a sudden it feels like you've just got energy surging through your fingers, into the fretboard.

**I was kind of surprised to see that there aren't any songs from *Wastelands* on this release. Why is that?**

We're a very nostalgic band at this point in our career, and y'know, when we were thinking about the songs people wanted to hear, those just weren't the ones we thought about. There's a couple of songs on Wastelands I would have loved to put on – like, 'Last Beacon Light' is one of my favourite Eskimo Joe tracks of all time, but it's not what everyone else wants to hear. They want to hear the ones they grew up with, and the ones they've been seeing like for the past 24 years – so that's what we put on there. I honestly love that record, but a lot of people didn't gel with it. That's the honest truth.

**So now that you've done this epic capstone release, what's next for Eskimo Joe? Has the idea of a seventh album come up yet?**

Not a seventh album, but we're still keen on making music. We had two singles come over the last year or so, and we're hoping to write another one soon. We'll just keep trickling songs out. We're enjoying that method – and that's all that matters, really. The day we stop enjoying ourselves is the day we don't make any more music. And in the meantime, we've got a national tour coming up – that's really exciting for us, because it's been about three, almost four years in the making. To be able to finally get on a stage and play these songs, it's going to be a real buzz.

**What can we expect to see you shredding out on for that run?**

I am a creature of habit, I still love the Tele. it's been a workhorse since... Well, almost day one! I think the first guitar we played was a Gibson Nighthawk, and then I had an Ovation stereo output guitar, and then I think it was right before we did the first EP [Sweater] I bought a Tele, and I've been on Teles ever since. But surprisingly enough, my go-to at the moment is a Yamaha, the 335 copy. It's unbelievable. You've got your push-pull knobs for switching between the humbucker and single-coils, it's super versatile, the neck is amazing... Yeah, I love it!

# MOTHER OF ROCK

WHEN THE WORLD GETS DOWN, **WOLFMOTHER** GET UP… AND START ROCKING THE F*** OUT! *AUSTRALIAN GUITAR* RIFFS ON THEIR SURPRISE NEW SCORCHER, *ROCK OUT*.

WORDS BY **ANNA ROSE** AND **MATT DORIA**.

Rock out. No, really, do it. And do it with Wolfmother, for that is the very simple message that the band's Andrew Stockdale has slapped on the tin of the Aussie rock stalwarts' sixth studio album. *Rock Out*, in fact, is more than a message – it's a mantra. It's a conclusion drawn after journeying through existential inner turmoil and conducting outward observations of this erratic mid-pandemic world. The album sees Stockdale embrace the healing qualities of music and cultivate them as a guide for his new creation. It's a transportive effort that saw the frontman – and hopefully, his listeners – through tumultuous times and into a euphoric haven.

Wolfmother looked all around for the guidance to make this album – back to simpler times and classic British rock for tracks like 'Feelin' Love', with the influences likes Cream and Deep Purple evident in the riff-laden chorus, turning inward and facing personal crisis only to share outwardly the angst in the neurotic (but brilliant) 'Humble'. Stockdale and co. entertain themes of delusion, procrastination and ultimately, silent victory, rocking out all through the pandemic that shut the world down.

Wolfmother's sound is ubiquitous, certainly, but with *Rock Out*, Stockdale has whipped up a sound that speaks for all.

**Can you speak to the medicinal properties of rock 'n' roll, so to speak?**

It breaks down all the pretence, y'know, when you're at a live show. There's something about a band playing that changes the atmosphere of the room and the people in it. It brings people together, and they're able to have a shared experience – there's a bonding element to it. And I guess that's been out of our lives for a couple years, y'know? We've had it in short doses, but it's been rare.

Live music has always been such a huge part of people's mental health – either through traveling or work or socialising – and I guess my contribution, at least, is to give people something to listen to when they've got nothing else to.

**So did you have the stage in mind when you were writing these songs?**

Yeah, without a doubt! I think if you play rock music, it's going to fall into the category of drums, bass, guitar and vocals – it's a tried and tested formula that can result in millions of different types of music. So I always try to adhere to the rules of that, which then translate really well to the live show.

**Is it true that you recorded the whole thing with a local Uni student?**

Very much so, yeah! This 19-year-old kid from the SAE Institute, Cameron Lockwood, who I met in a café around the corner. I was just having breakfast, and he came up and went, "Hey man, if you ever need an engineer, I'll work for free." I think he did work for free initially, but I was like, "Dude, this is work, I'm going to pay you engineer rates to do this."

But yeah, man, the ears don't hear whether it's a 50-year-old man or a 19-year-old man – if a guy's doing a good job, he's doing a good job. And plus, we've been in COVID, so it's not like I can go to Sydney or Brisbane or LA or anywhere to work at some fancy, $2,000-a-day studio.

**I was also reading about how some of these tracks came together in a matter of hours, like 'Humble' and 'Only Way'. What is it about that real loose, heat-of-the-moment style that you reckon makes for such a great tune?**

Well, I'm glad it sounds like it has. We tracked it quickly, without a doubt, but I probably wrote ['Humble'], like, three months in advance. I just tracked it on the laptop, on GarageBand, and then I literally played what I'd done through the PA and said to the guys, "Okay, this is kind of what I'm doing." I think if you're a songwriter in a band, preparation definitely helps for a quick session.

**What kind of guitars were you tracking on for this record?**

I've shifted to the Explorer recently. I've got a brown Explorer, which I bought in Tel Aviv after our last show in Europe – I think that was in 2019. So I've been using that. And I bought an olive, drab green Epiphone Explorer up in Brisbane, at Manny's Music, maybe six months ago.

The Explorer just has a different sort of vibe. It sits differently, with the strap and everything over your shoulder – it puts your hands at a different angle, and I find that it's more of a guitar player's electric. It feels like it's designed for you to be able to play up the fretboard, and your hand isn't running into the body of the guitar… And, of, course, it just looks cool [*laughs*].

**What about in the way of effects? Are you much of a pedal nerd these days?**

I haven't bought a new pedal in years. I've probably got, like, 50 pedals – it was just one of those things where I *had* to stop buying more. But essentially I use a POG, a Micro Synth and a wah pedal, and that's pretty much it. I just put out another track called 'Midnight Train', and I double tracked the Micro Synth on the middle-eight track, and, it's got this glitchy, binary kind of breakdown sound to it. It's pretty cool.

**Later this month, Wolfmother is, of course, headlining the first-ever Uncaged Festival. When you got that pitch for the tour, what made you leap at it?**

Well, I say 'yes' to pretty much any show at this point, after not having any gigs to play for two years. I wish I could say there was some special reason, but yeah, we just have to say 'yes' to everything now because you've really got to strike while the iron's hot, and get out there while you can. But I mean of course, headlining a festival, what's not to love about that? That's an honor and and privilege, so we'd have to go for it regardless of COVID!

**Who are you personally most keen to see at the festival?**

The Hard-Ons with Tim Rogers, that's going to be pretty special. The first band that I ever played in, when I was 12 or 13, we would play the Hard-Ons' 'Let There Be Rock' cover for days on end. That was the only song we knew how to play, so we just played that repeatedly [*laughs*]. So yeah, those guys… I owe 'em one!

**What songs from *Rock Out* are you excited to bust out onstage?**

'Feeling Love' and 'Rock Out' – we've had those two in the setlist for the last few shows, and the response has been awesome, so those two will definitely be be in the set. Hopefully they'll become mainstay parts of the Wolfmother catalogue – the staples of the set, so to speak.

# CLASSIC CARS AND CRUISY CHORDS

FOR HIS THIRD ALBUM AS **DOPE LEMON**, INDIE-ROCK LUMINARY **ANGUS STONE** TOOK HIS HAZY, HONEYED FLAIR TO DIZZYING NEW HEIGHTS.

WORDS BY **ANNA ROSE** AND **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **DANIEL MAYNE**.

Back in 1996, Blind Melon made popular the song 'Three Is a Magic Number', forever solidifying the 1973 Bob Dorough ditty as a social staple, a term used in social banter and instances of luck, and of course, the music industry and an artist's all-important make or break third album. For Dope Lemon – the solo nom de plume of Byron-based indie lord Angus Stone – the faith is unwavering when it comes to his third studio effort, *Rose Pink Cadillac*.

Love, too, is unwavering. It's present in Stone's commitment to unlocking his full creative potential by throwing caution to the tonal winds, and too in the album's thematic interest. The sound and the sentiment are part and parcel to that end; jaunty jungles titillate the senses, while the album's narrative – a dizzyingly romantic story, one of utter self-belief, wherein Stone discovers the silver lining that is true love amid darkened skies – sees our hero capture the thrill of realising a far-fetched dream in a chasm of psych-y bends and dizzying strums.

Some, though, may not be as drawn to the glitzy daydreams aesthetic of *Rose Pink Cadillac*, and instead pine for the mystic waters of its predecessors, 2019's *Smooth Big Cat* and 2016's *Honey Bones*. But as Stone tells *Australian Guitar*, it was time to evolve. For Dope Lemon, three definitely is the magic number.

**I know the big day was supposed to come a fair while back, but still, how does it feel being in the home stretch with LP3?**

It feels good! I think it's a solid, solid body of work. Every record starts with one song, and if it's strong enough, that song can be the catalyst for an entire project – you sort of feed off that energy, and this kinetic snowball starts to builds up momentum. And this was one of those projects.

**What was that catalyst?**

I think it started with a song called 'Howl With Me'. I was playing *Grand Theft Auto*, back in the day when I used to game a bit, and you can change the radio stations in the cars when you're driving around. I heard this old band called The Chakachas, and this song ['Stories'] had this really cool vibe. So I called up the head of Sony, and then he called someone else, and we were all trying to find the band so I could sing on the track.

We found this old guy in Paris that owned the rights to the music; I think everyone in the band had either passed away or just weren't involved in it anymore. But this guy, he allowed us to sing on it, and that ended up becoming 'Home Soon' [from the *Hound's Tooth* EP]. But The Chakachas had another instrumental that I really enjoyed and that I wanted to sing on, and that became 'Howl With Me'. That's the song that sort of sparked this record. It's a bit of a storytelling tune.

**Is that a fairly typical method of songwriting for you?**

No, those songs were super different! I've only done it twice – the first time was 'Home Soon', and now 'Howl With Me'. But I don't know, I think it's good to diversify your craftsmanship and the way you approach songwriting. This is me, in a way, picking up a new skill – finding something and making it my own.

**When I think about a rose pink Cadillac – the car itself, not the album – a lot comes to mind. It's a very *distinct* aesthetic – not to say it hasn't aged well, but it's certainly a product of its time. Is that motif something you wanted to channel into this record sonically?**

Yeah. I think it comes down to a few things. Some days you'll wake up and your mood will be on a whole different level to where it was the day before. Stylistically, I like to just follow that and see where it takes me. And then you also have to be conscious of your intention of, like, what style you want to go for. I think it's just that each day is different when you step into the studio, but if you keep an open mind and heart, it'll only lead you in the right direction.

**I love the concept that the first half of *Rose Pink Cadillac* represents the "daytime" Dope Lemon experience, and then you kind of get a little darker for that second half. Where did that idea come from?**

I think when you start talking to different journalists, and you start explaining what it is that happened, you start to piece together what actually did happen. We stepped into the studio just as COVID was kicking up dust, and I guess my way of looking at the world and where it was, was to try and share love through what I do. It felt like it was the right thing to do at the time, with what was going on – y'know, the anarchy of the world.

I thought of [*Rose Pink Cadillac*] as a way that I could give back – that's the concept, I guess. Now that I can look back on it, I'd like to call it my "love album". And the artwork, with the animated vinyl, it sort of follows the mood as it goes down into a different place.

**What kind of guitars were you strummin' away on for this record?**

I've got this one guitar from my dad – it's the first guitar he ever bought off his guitar teacher. That was his first guitar, and it's only had three owners. It's a 1968 Telecaster with a Bigsby. It's super rare to have the Bigsby on the Tele. It's beautiful. The patina on it is worn away from years of belts scratching against it whilst playing, and the arm over the base and the pick guard is all worn away.

And all the frets, you can see where dad obviously loved to play his favourite chord – it's just this really beautiful, warn, and well-loved guitar – and that generally makes it into a lot of the records that that we make. Besides that, there was a 1960s Epiphone guitar that I got at the Chicago Exchange maybe five years ago. That was cool to have, that made it onto 'Kids Fallin' In Love' and 'Every Day Is A Holiday'.

There's a whole wall of different guitars in the studio, and depending on the mood you're in, you can sort of reach up and pick off the instrument to suit.

**What about in the way of things like effects, are you much of a pedal nerd these days?**

I have my staple diet, in the pedal world, that I stick to. I love the [JHS] Pink Panther and the [Electro-Harmonix] Holy Grail – they generally give you a really lush and interesting way to get a warped sound on what you're doing. Those are my two staples.

# YEAR 'ROUND SPOOKY SEASON

**METHYL ETHEL** ISN'T LIKE MOST GUITARISTS. SO, NATURALLY, HIS NEW ALBUM ISN'T LIKE MOST GUITAR ALBUMS. IT'S *BETTER*.

WORDS BY **ANNA ROSE** AND **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **XAN THORRHOEA**.

Teetering past the magic third album, Methyl Ethel – the nom de plume of multi-instrumentalist Jake Webb – will drop a fourth next month. Where its predecessors were turned around quickly, *Are You Haunted?* sees Webb pull back and take a fine-tooth comb to the release. There's not an air of perfectionism about him when he chats with *Australian Guitar*, though – rather, Webb was careful to cultivate a particular sound: one, he says, which could only come about once he endeavoured to employ a new creative process.

An intricate and delicate approach to *Are You Haunted?* wasn't restricted to Webb's songwriting; it manifested in the execution and indeed, his perception of his craft. Webb views his guitars as his tools, not instruments, and used them to create a wealth of the kaleidoscopic indie-rock nuances explored on *Are You Haunted?* The unique choice of tools meant Webb was able to come up with a plethora of tones for this release, from rich and dark, rounded and robust, to... Well, flat and dead, as he puts it – that particular sound achieved with a guitar equipped with just four strings.

This perspective and unconventional method, though, sees Webb become far more meticulous than he's ever been. Rewriting melodies, adjusting tempos, shaking up rhythms, adopting synthesisers to enhance the guitar's textures... Webb has truly done it all, and in doing so, taken himself on a brand new journey through music.

**Did the uncertainty of touring over the past couple of years have an impact on how you approached this album?**

Not at all. I don't even have the live show yet. It's all kind of unconsciously visual, the way that I make the music. It serves its own purpose. It's all unto itself – all of the bits and pieces to unlock are all woven into the fabric of the record, y'know, from the album title and the track names, the lyrics, the through-line of it all, the way things flow... It's its own experience. The live show can sometimes feel like a necessity. But the live show always has the potential to have as much value as the record. I just don't ever feel like I have enough time or resources. Y'know, it's hard to put together all the bits and pieces when there are so many moving parts; but making the music is something that I can do very easily and economically.

**So going from *Triage* into this weird and wonderful new era, how did you want to push the Methyl Ethel project forward, or build upon what you'd already established creatively with the first three records?**

I guess for starters, I try not to think about what the project has grown to represent to anybody else. I always enjoy making music, but the sort of record that I'm going to make doesn't really evolve until a certain point. And making this one was interesting. There are certain things I was interested in, but this time, I really just wanted to spend a lot of time making sure everything was just the way it needed to be.

I turned around the other albums really quickly, but this time around, it was more of an exploration inwards, into the songs themselves, to see what they wanted to become. And yeah, I rewrote these songs so many times – there are whole lyric sheets for all of the songs that changed. Keys changed, tempos changed – everything changed until it all felt right. And in the end, although there are technical things where I'm still like "Ooh, I didn't quite get it," these songs are as close to perfect as I could make them, without wanting to overcook them.

**You have to step back at some point, otherwise a record will never be done.**

Yeah, and I'm not a perfectionist at all. I just want the songs to sound a certain way, or exist in a certain realm.

**I've always loved the way you incorporate the guitar into your music, because it feels like you are just constantly finding new ways to explore and experiment with the instrument in non-traditional ways. How do you see yourself thinking outside the box as a guitarist?**

There are a few technical things. I find that the guitar can be really expressive. And especially because I've been playing it for so long, I've just found my own ways to play it. In the studio, it becomes more of a tool than an instrument. I can go really deep and show you all the things I used on the album, if you want – I've got all the guitars right here!

**Sure!**

Okay, so I have essentially three electric guitars that I use. There's this old guitar, a little Japanese [Fender] Jaguar, and I keep it now just with four strings on it. It has a really dead, shitty, kind of like West African pop guitar sound. But I keep four strings on it, and it's always tuned to something wacky so that I don't go where I think I'm going go. Then there's this Rickenbacker, and I always have flat-wound jazz strings on it so that it's always super dark. I always play with my fingers on this guitar, too, to give it a bit more of a rounded kind of sound. It's a good one to double the bass with, up the octave.

With this album, more than ever before, I wanted my guitar to actually sound like an electric guitar. So apart from those little technical things like playing flat-wound strings or tuning it weirdly, I'll play it through a synthesiser and pump the sounds out through the room to get a lot of those Heroes, Robert Fripp sort of guitar sounds. The guitar is a really textural thing for me.

**I think a more blasé artist might just use a sample or a synth to get the sounds you get with a guitar. Is it gratifying to use an analogue instrument to make those digital sounds?**

Yeah. I mean, being able to record my own music in my own space, moreso than ever before, is what's fun about it. I think even the time spent plugging the guitar in and finding all of those tones, that's time spent thinking about what I'm going to do with it. And you're right, it's so easy to just grab bits and pieces, and resample everything. I do a lot of that, and I love all of that, but so often I'll spend all day tracking a guitar part, and it won't make it onto the song itself, but by the end of the day, you realise where the song needs to go because of that.

# A ROYAL EFFORT

15 YEARS IN THE MAKING, *STRENGTH OF A QUEEN* – THE DEBUT ALBUM BY ALT-COUNTRY STALWART **ANDY GOLLEDGE** – IS STACKED FROM COVER TO COVER WITH SOON-TO-BE CLASSICS.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **ALEX WALL**.

For the past decade and change, Andy Golledge spent his better days building up a reputable name as the country king of Sydney's inner-west. Now, with *Strength Of A Queen* – an 11-track album that chronicles his musical journey thus far – Golledge is out to make his mark on Australia at large. Then, if all goes according to plan (and if the record itself gives us any indication, it sure as hell will), the world.

Ebbing and flowing between dry, searing country evocative of '60s Americana, soul-soothing indie rock and loud, towering classic rock à la Journey and Van Morrison, *Strength Of A Queen* is an infectiously riveting listen. Like Golledge himself, it's rooted in soulfulness and a deep love for community values – he dedicates it to his batting grounds, and pours his heart out into every one of its fiercely rich, heavy-hitting vocal passages.

As he tells *Australian Guitar*, Golledge didn't set out to craft his debut album as a singular, conceptual body of work – it's an earned and earnest compendium of a life wholly lived, embracing all the euphoric highs and punishing lows that comes with such. He didn't intend for it to take as long as it did to materialise, but there's no way he could have made it until now, either.

**Given this record has been a solid 15 years in the making, how does it feel to finally have it under your belt?**

It feels crazy, hey! The album has such a good mix of really old songs, really new songs, and kind-of-somewhere-in-between songs. But it just feels right. It's the right time for this album to come out, y'know? For whatever reason I took so long to pursue music as a career in general, that aside, it feels awesome. And we've got so many shows coming up this year – fingers crossed it all goes ahead! But regardless, the album will come out, the songs will be released, they'll be free – they'll be able to fly around and live their life, and I'll be able to live mine.

**Why *did* it take you so long? Were you just waiting for the right moment to strike?**

Oh, no. It was depression, anxiety, severe ADHD… All the things that would stop me from doing anything [*laughs*]. I just didn't believe in myself for a very long time. And then, y'know, I took the steps to manage those health issues, and now here I am. But that's just how long it took – there's no point in going, "Geez, I wish I would've done this earlier!" I think if I *had* done it earlier, I wouldn't have this record of what I think is really, really strong material and really fantastic music. And y'know, to build a relationship with essentially the same five people for about seven or eight years, that's a real testament to our sound.

**When you're working on a song, how important is the chemistry that you have with your band?**

I think first and foremost, we're just friends, and that has a big impact on the dynamic. Because I don't really like to come down on anyone for playing something wrong, and I don't really take the song and go, "This is what I want you to play." If I have a specific idea for a guitar part, I'll say it, but generally we just get in there and jam. The rehearsal tends to get carried away with us, and we just spend the whole session jamming out on the one song. That's kind of just how it works, y'know? You leave your egos at the door.

**In the press release, you describe *Strength Of A Queen* as "the road trip of [your] life so far". How does that come across in the way the record unfolds?**

It's interesting, because the tracklist has a great narrative, it kind of ebbs and flow and it has a lot of light and shadow. But it's not really in chronological order, as such. It's more just a way of expressing the journey – as far as the energy is concerned – of our live show. Y'know, the slow builds and the big, crazy rock kind of vibe, and then the parts where it goes back down and comes back up to that again. The record ends on a big singalong, just like our live show usually does.

That was our only real objective in recording this music, y'know – because I'd tried to go in the studio and record to clicks and all that kind of stuff, and it just didn't work. So we just continued to play heaps of shows. And then we were playing a show one day, and my producer was like, "Man, I think you guys are ready." So we just went into the studio and did everything live. We just added some guitars over the top, and we used as little compression as possible to make it sound really nice and big and full.

I think we've achieved a really great sound; it's not too far detached from our live set, which is something that I've always been really concerned with. Because y'know, sometimes you go to a show and you're like, "F***, man, that was full of energy, it was so sick," but then you go home and listen to a track that's been recorded on a click, and you just don't get that same 'oomph'.

**What guitars were you wielding in the studio for this record?**

So, as we've evolved, Leroy and I have kind of been molding each other's musical influences – sending each other clickbait, so to speak. And we've ended up near this funky, country kind of realm – I don't think we're quite there yet, but I don't necessarily want to get there – you don't want to sound like a copy of your influences. But y'know, it's that Little Feat, Ry Cooder vibe; Leroy actually bought an old Strat and turned it into a Coodercaster. All those slide sounds and the chunky fingerpicking stuff on the record, that's all done on that Coodercaster.

I think Ollie mostly played the Tele and the pedal steel. That Tele is something I've always really wanted, but Leroy's never been inclined to play one. Ollie bringing in the Tele was really good – I've always been a huge fan of Bruce Springsteen, and a Tele underneath the Strat there, chugging along, is just super awesome. As far as the guitars went, I think we kept it pretty simple. We just kept it as close as possible to our live sound. I think we even kept our amps clean for most of it, and then added all the trills on the on the back end.

I just used my old Harmony – it's a little 1969 model with this cool Fender headstock that really took my fancy. I think I just picked it up and went, "Yeah, this looks cool." And it sounded cool, so I was like, "Yep, okay, this is mine now." It's all mids, so it just sits in the middle of the band – it's super easy to mix in, you don't have to do too much to it. We just tried to keep it as simple as possible, really.

# THE POWER WITHIN

THOUGH ITS THEMES CERTAINLY REFLECT ITS TITLE, **CHARLIE COLLINS**' SECOND ALBUM, *UNDONE*, IS ALSO VICIOUSLY EMPOWERING, HONEST AND HEARTFELT.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **SHE IS APHRODITE**.

In announcing her long-awaited second album, *Undone*, indie-folk luminary Charlie Collins warned fans they were in for "some of the most honest, vulnerable music" she'd ever written. What made it read as a warning was the fact that Collins' output thus far hadn't exactly been your typical sunshine-and-roses, bubblegum pop-level fare – the Tamworth native had long worn her heart on her sleeve, with 2019's *Snowpine* being one of the year's most strikingly poignant releases. But its follow-up, she promised, would "expose a lot of who I am and what I was going through".

Lo and behold, *Undone* is an unapologetically heavy, sobering listen. But amid all the gut-wrenching rawness is a palette of tones so unpredictably colourful – meticulous and intricate, yet at once loose and playful – that it's hard not to walk away from the record feeling energised. When the soul-baring lyrics collide with the effervescent soundscape, it gives off a potent sense of razor-sharp catharsis. *Undone* shows Collins at her most vulnerable, yes, but it also shows her at her most confident, her most spontaneous and her most inspired.

*Undone* is the most authentic reflection of Charlie Collins we've ever seen (or heard, rather), and although she does abandon her folky roots for much of the album – the bulk of it flirts with synthpop and modern R&B – it never feels like she's mere trying to follow trends or break into newer, maybe more commercially lucrative corners of the industry. At its core, *Undone* sounds like Charlie Collins, through and through.

*Australian Guitar* caught up with Collins – from the back of an Uber en route to the airport, hours out from her trekking off to the UK – to chat about how the record came to be, how her newfound knack for collabs gave its sonic palette an extra little zing, and why at the end of the day, she'll always call the acoustic guitar (to be exact, a handmade De Gruchy) home.

**How does it feel to be on the other side of this record, given everything you put into it?**

I have so many feelings. Obviously, first of all, I'm so excited. But I don't know, there's also a part of me that's scared. This record is the most vulnerable body of work I've ever made, and everything's so honest and literal. So it's kind of emotional. When I announced it, I had a big cry – it was just kind of overwhelming, the fact that it's finally coming out and people are going to hear what I've been through.

**Going from the *Snowpine* era to this bold new chapter, how did you want this record to embody your growth as an artist?**

This record has been a while in the making. I actually intended to have it out way sooner – like early last year – and I recorded it all in 2020. But there was just something about it, to me, that just didn't feel right. So I just did some more writing. I started writing with some friends, because I felt like I could evolve even more after *Snowpine* and explore myself musically in a way that I'd never done before.

Even collaborating with other people – which I never did on *Snowpine* – it was nice to bring those other voices into the music and have other people's influences in there, build our worlds together and create this beautiful sound that's a lot more musical than it would be without them.

**I read that you'd actually scrapped the first version of *Undone*. What happened there?**

Well I didn't scrap the whole thing, I scrapped half of it. But like I was saying, there was something about it that just didn't feel right. It didn't feel as raw, or as honest as I wanted it to be – I knew I could push myself even more. It's just that thing, like, you always want to make the best record you could ever make.

I wanted to keep the full version of myself intact on *Undone*, so I just started writing again, and all this other stuff came out. Like 'Undone', that only came to me a couple of months ago. So I'm glad I did push the 'hold' button on it, and allow myself to come up with some more stuff.

**I love the way this record balances those really big, energetic pop songs like 'Just My Luck' and 'F*** It' with some of those more folk-oriented, lowkey acoustic songs like 'Hit The Lights' and 'No More To Lose'. How did you go about crafting this record's tonal palette?**

I wanted everything to feel quite organic, but I also wanted to myself musically, and add things like synths into some of the songs. I didn't want to pigeonhole myself into any one particular style or sound.

**Does the core of a new song still begin with the acoustic guitar?**

Initially, yeah, a lot of the songs started out on an acoustic guitar. The co-writes were a bit more collaborative in a sense – they always started with some synths and drums and stuff like that.

**Where did you tend to head from there, gear-wise?**

So I always play my De Gruchy acoustic – it was made by a guy in South Australia, and I bought that guitar when I was, like, 12. It's like my baby, I just take it everywhere with me. I actually did my first guitar solo on 'November', which I played on a Fender Custom Deluxe Tele – that's my electric guitar, and I love that so much. And then my guitarist... Gosh, I don't even know what guitars he uses. He changes all the time. Like, I actually can't keep up because he would change his guitar, like, every single day [*laughs*].

**What is it about that De Gruchy that just makes your heart skip a beat?**

That guitar just feels like home to me. It's comforting. I feel safe with it onstage because I got it when I was so young, and I've never played any other acoustic guitar since i got it. I feel like that guitar a part of me – it's like molded to my fingers [*laughs*]. I've written all of my songs on it, and I'm just so attached to it. And it sounds incredible! So I don't know... It's almost like my little good luck charm. I named it Peanut, because it literally looks like a little peanut.

**Did you make the new record with your live band?**

Yeah, I did about half the record with the live band. It's so beautiful. There's something about [recording with the band] that's just so organic. I love when you can feel the energy, because you're all working together as a team to create this beautiful body of sound – I love that feeling. It's just feels very organic. And I don't know, it's almost like you can feel the song even more, because you're not just individually cutting and pasting things. Everyone's being perfect in an imperfect kind of way, and there's a lot more soul in it. So it was nice to do that.

# DIGITALISED CHAOS

IF 2019'S *ALIEN* BROUGHT **NORTHLANE** TO THEIR PEAK, ITS FOLLOW-UP – THE DARK AND CONVULSIVE, ELECTRO-CENTRIC *OBSIDIAN* – TAKES THEM FAR BEYOND THE POINT OF "OVERDRIVE".

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.

Cutting their teeth as UNFD darlings in the world of mathy, mosh-primed metalcore, Northlane started dipping their toes into the realm of a more electro-centric style with their third album, 2014's *Node*. It wasn't until their fifth, however – 2019's career-defining *Alien* – that the Sydney trailblazers would go all the way, twining to their signature slate of tearing riffs and brutalised breakdowns a shimmery palette of thumping trance and visceral bass music. They were unfazed by the prospect of throwing off their fanbase, but they needn't have worried to begin with: *Alien* was a monumental success.

So, for its follow-up – *Obsidian*, the band's first wholly independent offering out in April – Northlane have pushed themselves further outside the box by cranking up all the experimental chaos they explored on *Alien* well past 11. The riffs are thicker, faster and more intense, the electronic elements more explosive and defined, and Marcus Bridge's kaleidoscopic vocal prowess taken to a whole 'nother level. To find out how they did, *Australian Guitar* caught up with Josh Smith and Jon Deiley, the band's guitarists, producers and core songwriters.

**Of all the bands that have kept active throughout the pandemic, Northlane are easily one of the most impressive. And now you've got a whole new album on the way! What's it been like behind the scenes?**

**Josh:** I think we were able to make it look like there was momentum from the outside, because we did have quite a few things come out over the last two years – but we got really lucky with how we were planning ahead and had a lot of stuff in the bag to roll out. We've been pretty flat out – it's only since we recorded [*Obsidian*] that things have been a little bit quieter. But what's going on in our lives isn't reflective of what the machine, Northlane, is doing at all times. And honestly, for me, it's been incredibly exciting to see how it's all been received.

We've taken massive risks with this album. We took a massive risk releasing 'Echo Chamber' as the single, and the way it's been received has just been phenomenal. A lot of people are kind of coming to understand what we do creatively, as a band. I'm not saying this with any form of ego, because I'm just a songwriter, but Jon creates trends. Northlane creates trends – and we've done it for a long time, but I don't think it's something we've really been credited for until now.

**What was the vision you had for *Obsidian?***

**Jon:** I never really have a clear vision beforehand, when I'm first approaching an album. [The songs are] kind of just these ideas that slowly evolve over time. But I suppose it was always going to have the electronic influence that *Alien* had, because that's just what I love. Electronic music inspires me, but obviously, my core foundation is as a guitarist in a proper band, so I'm just constantly trying to perfect that hybrid of the two worlds.

A lot of the ideas will evolve over a long period of time, and they change drastically as well – sometimes the vision for a song changes right at the very last second, y'know, on the eighth draft. [*Alien* track] 'Sleepless' was like that, it was a rock song at first, and then out of nowhere, once we got the vocal on it, I was like, "Man, this would be so much cooler if it was way stripped back." Then it became this chill drum 'n' bass song.

So to answer your question, the vision isn't always super clear. But I guess that's what allows Northlane to evolve the way it does, because it doesn't have a definitive set of parameters for us to work within. It is what it is, at the end of the day.

**That fusion of metal and electronica – it's not a totally new concept, but where tradition has always dictated a blend metal guitars with things like bass music and dubstep, because they're both heavy styles, Northlane takes a different approach with elements of house music, trance and trip-hop. How did you develop that style?**

**Jon:** I don't want to sound like I'm talking myself up, but it's actually really f***ing hard to do. There are so many times where I'm trying to make the two work, and most of the time it's pretty jarring. But then I'll just find this random sweet spot where they work together. Generally, I try to figure out what the most important thing is – is it the synth idea or the bass idea, or is it the guitar riff? And then I collapse everything else around that.

With 'Echo Chamber', the intro you hear is literally just a one-take of this synth jam I did one day. And then I was like, "Okay, the guitar has to do *that* in the chorus." But the synth doesn't actually play in the chorus, it kind of ducks out for the guitars to push through and do what the synth was doing. You've really got to think about how those elements share the space, and make sure that they're not always doing the same thing on top of each other.

**There's an ebb and flow to it, right?**

**Jon:** Definitely. And if you don't find the right balance, you hit that wall, like I was saying before, where it feels a bit jarring.

**Josh:** The other person I've heard do it really well is obviously Mick Gordon, but his style is so much different to ours; the key difference is that we have to allow room for a vocal to drive the song. It's so much easier to bring heaps of stuff into an instrumental song, rather than create a framework to support a vocal. Usually what happens is, I hear other artists grabbing these elements that Jon grabs, but they become... I'm not going to say they become a gimmick, but for lack of a better word, they become a piece of the song that they don't properly execute.

**Jon:** I know exactly what you mean by that, because ever since we started putting breakbeat stuff in some of our newer songs, I've started hearing way more breakbeat stuff in metal music. I'm sure we weren't the first band to do it, but what I've been picking up on is that, like Josh said, it's kind of used in one part of the song and then they go, "Okay, we've ticked that off."

It gives their song that flare, but it doesn't necessarily carry the song – it's just this tiny little part in it. Whereas with '4D', for example, it's a long story for how that came to be, but there's a breakbeat going through that whole f***ing song, and we collapsed the real drum kit around the breakbeat. It's almost like they're identifying the sound or the tone from an electronic genre, but they don't necessarily know how to implement it properly, or know the history behind it.

**Is that where having eight drafts of a song can come in handy? Because you're able to really nurture and grow the song?**

**Jon:** Definitely, yeah. And I'm still sort of figuring it out. I don't think I've mastered it yet. I don't know if I ever will. But it's a fun thing to do. It can be really gruelling to try and get those worlds to work together, but when you do, it's such a good payoff.

# RITUAL RIFFAGE

**BODYJAR** HAVE RETURNED WITH THEIR FIRST ALBUM SINCE 2013, *NEW RITUALS*. ON IT, THE POP-PUNK MAINSTAYS EXPLORE BELTING NEW TERRITORY WITH A KEEN EAR FOR THE CLASSIC STUFF.

WORDS BY **ANNA ROSE** AND **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **FARLEY WEBB**.

Across almost three decades, Bodyjar have cultivated a dedicated fanbase both at home and overseas, utilising a tight regimen of blistering touring and unadulterated live shows. The Melbourne legends' brand of no-holds-barred punk has cemented them as one of Australia's gold standards in the genre, notable not just in their live performances, but in their eight studio albums – a catalogue set to expand with a ninth album next month.

Though it's been dubbed *New Rituals*, the release isn't exactly new Bodyjar. The band, as they tell *Australian Guitar*, actually made a return to the energetic tones and upbeat rhythms on which they cut their teeth all those years ago. It's a touch of the old mixed with the new, produced by the band alongside Sam Johnson, whose production resume boasts name like Northlane, Luca Brasi and Camp Cope, among others. Throw in mixing duties by Steve Evetts (New Found Glory, Architects), and you've got yourself a whopping serve of tasty Bodyjar delights.

**So it's been nine years between drinks for Bodyjar – what took you guys so long to get back into album mode?**

We started working on it probably two and a half years ago, so we had the intention to put it out around two years ago. But because of the pandemic and everything, we weren't allowed to record, and the whole plan got shaken up. But it ended up being good for the album, I reckon, because we had an opportunity to work on things a bit more. We thought we had a good album, but we ended up scrapping about half of it and writing new songs, and it ended up being way better for it. If you put a bit more time and effort into editing yourself and throwing away all the bullshit, you end up with a better record. So, in the end, it was cool.

**How much did the record change between the first draft and what we hear now?**

A little bit! We've got Nick [Manuell] on bass – he joined the band after we started working on it, and he had this idea that [the record] should be a bit noisier and a bit more harsh sounding, so we started writing a few more songs in that vein. But it actually ended up being a bit more produced than I thought it would. We ended up getting Steve Evetts to mix it in the states – he's done everyone from The Dillinger Escape Plan to The Cure, and *tonnes* of pop-punk bands.

He's got the best mixing skills – when you give him a song, it always comes back with this sheen on it, y'know? That American radio-rock sheen. [The record has] still got a lot of noise and feedback on it, though – probably more than any other Bodyjar record. It's definitely an abrasive album.

**I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't ask about that Dragon cover. Where did the idea come from to put the Bodyjar twist on 'Rain'?**

We'd always f***ed with it at jams and stuff. I remember a few years ago, we were going to try and [record] it, but we just never got around to doing it. We'd always had 'A Hazy Shade Of Winter' as our cover in the live set, and maybe a Descendents song here and there – but we thought "Well, 'A Hazy Shade Of Winter' always goes down well, let's try to do another song from that era." And then we were thinking about what song to do; we tried a couple of Midnight Oil songs, but then I was reading Marc Hunter's book, *Chasing The Dragon*, and the story of Dragon was just so interesting.

They were originally from New Zealand, and they were like a prog-rock sort of band, but then they moved to Sydney and sort of became... Almost like a pop band. But they always wrote really good songs, I thought – they were all really, really strong songwriters. They even had Tommy Emmanuel on guitar for a little while! They were one of those bands where on a bad night, they were totally f***ing shit – but then any other night, they'd just be absolutely brilliant. I always thought they were a cool band.

**There's also this f***ing incredible collab track, 'Little Pieces'. My copy didn't have a name in the tracklist, but whoever it is, she totally steals the show.**

Nat Foster! Yeah, so she's f***ing great. She killed it. We just wanted someone to come in and give a bit of spontaneity, y'know? And she's just got this really good scream on her. She did it in about three takes, I think, and she f***ing nailed it. She's got that... I don't know – she screams, but kind of in tune, if that makes sense? It's melodic, but she still sounds angry. I just love that she sound f***ing furious on it, because it's a very kind of formulated song – it's got parts and a very rigid structure – but she made it a bit more "out there" and a bit more wild.

**What guitars were you jamming out on in the studio for *New Rituals?***

Well, the first song we recorded was 'Big Shot', and we were trying to get a bit more of a classic sound – like AC/DC, Midnight Oil – something not as quite as distorted as we tend to be. I'm not a massive fan of that clean tone, but Tom, he's got tonnes of vintage gear and he's really into vintage Telecasters, and he wanted that classic sound. I always give him shit and tell him he's trying to sound like Keith Urban or something – but once you layer it, it sounds pretty thick and good.

And then we gave it to Steve to mix, and he made it sound like a f***ing metal song. So we were like, "Well, what the f*** are we doing!?" We were trying to do this clean thing, but that's just not us – I think our tone is just a strong, kind of more distorted and overdriven punk-rock tone. I think there's parts where you can strip it back a little bit and go a bit cleaner, but the majority of it, it's chords, it's got to sound heavy and thick, and all the muting's got to sound chunky and a bit metallic. That's just our sound, y'know?

We all use old guitars and old amps and stuff, but I think they're pretty distorted. Not as much as they used to be – we used to play with Dual Rectifiers and shit, and that was just crazy – but we've got a solid arsenal these days, too.

**Did you have a go-to guitar?**

I've got a 1980s SG, but it's been played so much that it's a little bit twisted. I've just had it re-fretted, but it's almost so old and bashed that it doesn't stay in tune properly. You need to tune G string a specific way for certain chords and stuff like that. So I just bought another SG off our old guitar tech, and that's perfect. It's got jumbo frets, so it suits my big f***ing sausage fingers. I've got that, and I've also got a cream white Explorer – like a James Hetfield-style '89 model – and that's killer, that stays in tune real good.

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# SOARING INTO THE STRATOSPHERE

PLANET RECORDED THEIR DEBUT ALBUM AS A CLANDESTINE OPERATION, WITH A PRODUCER WORKING REMOTELY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD. IT WAS AN AMBITIOUS FEAT, BUT GODDAMN, DID IT ALL PAY OFF IN THE END!

WORDS BY **ANNA ROSE** AND **MATT DORIA**. PHOTO BY **NATHAN MCDONALD**.

Chaos and confusion stumped PLANET's plans in 2020, so the Sydney outfit bunkered down at home in the city's inner-west and wrote *Information Overload*, their debut full-length offering due out in March.

As standalone tracks, *Information Overload* has it all – without, no pun intended, overloading the listener. From the jagged pull of the acoustic guitar that breaks the can open in 'Lost My Honesty', to the depth of doubt that guides the narrative of 'Ship Won't Change' – right the way over to a melancholic refrain as PLANET observe the state of modern life in 'Resign' – the band rolled with the punches and ended up with one hell of a prize. As the first chapter in what's shaping up to be a truly illustrious career, *Information Overload* is a rich, warm, whiskey-soaked dream of a release, flooded with some carefully tended-to guitar work

Set to feature on the album are previously released songs 'Ship Won't Change', 'Resign' and 'Aching Dream'. These boast '90s Britpop-come-all-Aussie-indie vibes, static sonic power and a melancholic, yet melodic lull – all of which complement the uniquely euphoric songs that allow *Information Overload* to become something bigger than the sum of its parts.

**What was it like making this record as a sort of clandestine, undercover operation?**

It was a good vibe! At first it felt a bit sketchy, but my mate who works there was just like, "Yeah, just sign in like you're a student and roll in." That was when COVID first really hit, so no-one was actually coming into the studio at all. We had the whole room to ourselves, pretty much, with this massive SSL desk worth half a million dollars or something. And we just rolled in, did all our guitars and bass there, did all the grand piano there… And it was just such a nice room to be in. But yeah, we had to be sneaky about it. You can't really be sneakily when you're bringing in a 12-inch Music Man amp in a flight-case, but we got it done somehow!

**So you were using all this incredible analogue equipment, tracking through real amps and all that – do you reckon that had a major impact on how the record sounds, as opposed to how you'd planned to record it?**

Yeah, definitely. Most of it would have actually been recorded in this room. I'm in my home studio in Redfern at the moment – I have a pretty simple setup, but enough to make it sound cool. That studio was just like the 'next step' sort of thing, actually going through good, proper channels. It makes such a difference. And just being in the environment as well, it felt so easy. Sometimes when you go to studios, you'd be like, "Oh shit, what's the time? How much is this costing?" But just sitting in that room, not really thinking about the clock too much, it was pretty refreshing. There was no-one going, "Oh, we have to rush this," so we just tried different things out and had fun.

**Were all the demos made in your home studio?**

Yeah. Tom [Peppit, guitars] and I are like the main writers, but because of the restrictions around COVID, we couldn't actually meet up. We had to send songs to each other over Google Drive, which was a first for us, because we're normally always in the room together. But it worked out in a way, because we could do stuff in our own time and not really feel like, "Oh, maybe I won't do this because we're trying to write this song together." Both of us could just do random stuff, and it sort of came together a bit better.

**What was it like working with Adrian Bushby from half the world away, too?**

Yeah, that was a strange one. It was just lots of Zooming and Google Driving. He's one of those guys who would write all his notes down on a piece of paper – he doesn't type much stuff at all. So we rolled in with all our little demos and be like, "Hey, we've got these notes for you," and he was like, "Oh, yeah, I've got mine too." We would copy and paste them in the chat, and then he'd just hold up a piece of paper [*laughs*]. It was a cool vibe – he's just a really nice guy, a bit more old-school, and had lots of cool things to say. He helped us evolve a lot of our songs, which was cool. It's really nice to have a second opinion from such a prolific sound engineer.

**Did the process feel as stinted as it sounds like it would be? To make *Information Overload* as intimate and interactive as it sounds, it feels like you'd have to really push through the limitations of technology.**

Yeah, definitely, that was a tricky thing. It was a lot harder than if you just went, "Okay, I'm going to book a studio for three weeks, we'll do it all here and smash it all out together." It was a bit more finicky, definitely – mainly because we were recording it all ourselves. But having that control also made it a bit less stressful – like I was saying, not thinking about the time, just trying out random shit and not really giving a f*** about anything, it was a lot more fun and refreshing.

**So what's the creative dynamic like between you and Tom as guitarists?**

It's just us constantly sending ideas back and forth. Tom really loves just banging out these massive choruses in Logic. He sends me these 40-second clips that are just like, "Bam!" They're straight-up in-your-face, which I love, and that's how evolve from a small idea into a big chorus. Whereas I like to send voice memos of myself just acoustic guitar, with the whole song done already. I might chuck on a riff or a synth part on, but it's normally pretty straightforward. I do it a bit more acoustically, he does a bit more electrically. But it definitely works, and it's cool.

Especially these last two years, sending everything digitally, having our own spaces and being able to sit back and really think about [our parts], rather than have to be in the same room with each other and have to jam everything out in the same way. Even though I love doing it that way, it's sort of refreshing, not having to bounce off each other. It's a lot cooler, I feel, being in your own head – because writing a song can be such a personal thing.

# LIGHT AND SHADE

**ZAKK WYLDE** EMERGES FROM LOCKDOWN WITH A **BLACK LABEL SOCIETY** ALBUM THAT LACES BALLADS WITH TWIN-GUITAR ROCKERS.

WORDS BY **MARK MCSTEA**.

Zakk Wylde first came to prominence when he joined Ozzy Osbourne's band as a replacement for Jake E. Lee, making his recorded debut with *Ozzy* in 1988 on 'No Rest For The Wicked'. The gig was a dream job for Wylde, who'd always loved Black Sabbath and cited Randy Rhoads as one of his favourite guitarists. Ozzy initially wrote off Wylde as a Rhoads clone, but once the guitarist got the chance to show what he could do, it was a no-brainer for the Prince Of Darkness.

Wylde has featured on Ozzy's records and in his live band on-and-off ever since. He embarked on a solo career while with Ozzy, recording *Pride And Glory* in 1994 and *Book Of Shadows* in 1996. Wylde formed his own band, Black Label Society, in 1999 and has released 15 albums under that banner.

Though Wylde has long been known for his berserker Viking image and uniquely pulverising guitar tone and riffs, there is far more to his playing than down-tuned grooves and screaming pinched harmonics, as heard on the new BLS album, *Doom Crew Inc*. The record showcases three ballads that amply illustrate Wylde's range of moods, styles and songwriting talents.

**How did the pandemic affect the making of this new record?**

When we came off the road, we figured we'd be back home for a month. Before we knew what was going on, it was over a year. We just thought we might as well make another record because we sure weren't going to be doing any shows. I arranged for the guys to come out to my studio here, the Black Vatican. I spent a month working on riffs and ideas. The way that I work is to complete a whole song, rather than stockpile an idea for a chorus or a bridge or something. I tracked all the guitars, with no drums or bass, and the rest of the guys laid down their parts in a couple of days.

**You're someone who seems to be constantly touring. How did you handle the enforced layoff from live work?**

Usually there's a cycle – you're getting ready for something, and there's a reason why you're practicing or rehearsing or whatever. Having the album and working on artwork, or whatever, gave me a real focus. I get an explosion of creativity once I get into the mindset and start working on new songs.

**Your approach this time was a little different in that you traded solos on a few songs with Dario Lorina, who also plays guitar with Black Label Society.**

On certain songs, such as 'Set You Free' and 'You Made Me Want To Live', I'd already written the solo ideas, and I got Dario to play some of those parts, a little like the Allman Brothers or something. But on others, he just came up with his own parts. He's an amazing guitarist, plus he can play piano and sing.

**You're not afraid to explore a more sensitive side in your music, with three strong ballads on the album. Where does that influence come from?**

My first mind-blowing experience with music was when I saw Elton John singing 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds' on *Cher* [hosted by singer-actress Cher] in the '70s. That was when I first got chills at the power of music. Elton is a master of the emotional ballad. The thing is, as much as I love Zeppelin doing 'Black Dog', I love 'Going To California', you know? Same with Sabbath. I loved it when they did 'Changes'.

**What Wylde Audio gear did you use?**

I use all my Wylde Audio guitars. I use the Nomad for the rhythms and the Heathens for some of the solos. I've been using Wylde Audio amps for the last three albums. There's some new designs coming out soon as well: the Thorax, the Raider, the Vulture and the Condor.

**You were always a huge Sabbath fan, and you even have your own tribute band, Zakk Sabbath. I guess it must have been a dream come true for you to hook up with Ozzy, whereas, ironically, Randy Rhoads never actually liked playing the Sabbath songs.**

Yeah, totally. It's kind of crazy that Randy didn't like Black Sabbath, I thought everybody liked Black Sabbath [*laughs*]. But then again, I think that's the reason that Randy worked so well, because he came from a completely different direction and a completely different set of influences. I was always a Sabbath freak, and I still am. What is hilarious is that when I was 15, I was playing Sabbath songs at keg parties, and now I'm 54 years old and I'm still playing Sabbath songs at keg parties. Though I guess the crowds are a little bigger.

**You're pretty loud live. Have you suffered any hearing issues after all these years?**

Well, I do have tinnitus, but then again nearly everyone I know who's been on the road a long time has issues to some degree. The funny thing is that when the alarm goes off on my freezer because the door was left open, my wife will ask me if I can hear it, and I can't because it's at exactly the same pitch as my tinnitus [*laughs*].

**You've seen big budgets with Ozzy, but things have changed so much now that I guess you have to tour to survive in the music business.**

It's a different thing. When I first started with Ozzy, if you didn't get a record deal by the time that you were 30, the dream was over, right? I can't tell you how many musicians I knew who'd been struggling for years and didn't get that deal and finally thought it was time to try to get a job. Today, you can be your own boss if you don't get a record deal.

Any band starting out now, they'll be on social media, recording at home, booking tours over the internet and building the empire. There's no sense that if you don't get that deal you're a failure, because you can build your own career. In that regard the business today is awesome, because whoever can put the work in and grind it out can survive. As long as you bring enough in to pay your bills, you can keep plugging away.

**You communicate so much through your solos, and of course there is so much more range that the guitar can explore compared to the voice. Have you ever been tempted to record an instrumental album?**

When Eddie Van Halen was asked why he didn't do a solo record, he said that every Van Halen record was a chance for him to express everything that he needed to say. It's that way for me, whether I'm playing with Black Label or Ozzy. I've always really loved songs. I love McLaughlin, Paco De Lucia, Jan Hammer. There's a lot to love in instrumental albums, but when I hear 'Stairway To Heaven', that solo is perfect – but it's in a song. I love to have the solo in a great song. That's what works best for me.

# BITE THE BULLET

HOW TO WRITE THE HEAVIEST METAL SONGS WITHOUT REVERTING TO FORMULA, ACCORDING TO **BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE** GUITARISTS **MATT TUCK** AND **PADGE**.

WORDS BY **AMIT SHARMA**. PHOTO BY **FIONA GARDEN**.

Bullet For My Valentine guitarists Matt Tuck and Michael 'Padge' Paget are no strangers to reinvention. Throughout the course of a 23 year-career, the band have continually searched for new ways to equate anthemic melody against metallic heaviness.

In 2018, their sixth album *Gravity* saw them experiment further away from their thrash metal roots, embracing more radio-friendly structures and flirting with electronica while still remaining very much a guitar band. But now the pendulum has swung again with a new, self-titled album that could be their heaviest yet. "We wanted this to be an extreme version of our band," Matt says, as he and Padge describe how the new songs were created – from the first bunch of riffs to the shredding solos they call 'widdly bits'…

**When did the songwriting process begin for the new album?**

**Matt:** I think we started in the studio back in Spring 2019, a long time ago now! We did some block writing sessions at a place called Vada, which is this really cool residential studio in Alcester. We just started putting ideas down. They weren't songs as such, just riffs or sections to catalogue as many as we could while we were there. Working there, we could double up the workload when preparing for a tour, there was a big live room. So we'd either be in there or in the studio. It was a productive working environment. We wanted to show people what we've got. We're more than capable of it.

**Padge:** [The new album] reminds me of the ferocious metal we grew up listening to – stuff like Pantera, Machine Head, Metallica, Slayer and Slipknot.

**In some ways, it feels like that heaviness is connected to Gravity being less abrasive.**

**Padge:** *Gravity* was definitely the catalyst that took us in this direction but everything felt great and no one's complaining. It felt right though, to me anyway, for us now to do a heavy record and throw something like this out there.

**Matt:** The new album is a direct consequence of *Gravity*. If we hadn't had gone there, this probably wouldn't have come out as aggressive. So that's a win-win in my opinion. I love *Gravity*, but it was a divisive record. We knew that while we were writing it and everyone thought that when it came out. But that's what you've got to do as an artist, stay true to yourself and do what you love. You're not writing for other people, it should be what you believe in. This time round was no different, it just happens that the contrast was very obvious and extreme. And I like those extremities.

We've already proven that we're a dynamic metal band. This time, it's more aggressive and technical… Guitar players and metalheads are going to love that! I don't think we've ever been happier, which feels strange. Usually there's a bit of whinging, but this time round everyone is really happy with the results.

**And for you, Padge, it must have exciting to be shredding harmonic minor solos again, like you do on 'Parasite'.**

**Padge:** Is that what the scale is? We just call them widdly bits [*laughs*]! We actually filmed some behind-the-scenes stuff and it was quite mad. The sessions happened really fast. I didn't remember doing some of the things I did and watching back it was like, "Bloody hell, that's some really good shit!" I don't like to suck my own dick a lot, but I was quite impressed watching the footage. We all put our hearts and souls into this one.

**What's your approach to constructing solos like that?**

**Padge:** I've always had the same approach. I'll get 16 bars in total, so I'll split that up in more and more sections, working out each one at a time. I'll mess around until something sounds good, coming up with an idea of where I start and where it ends. I like to make sections and then piece them all together. If everyone likes it, happy days. If there's a little lick they want me to swap out, I'll try something else. I'm totally open to suggestions… I actually like hearing what the others have to say after a take.

**Matt:** It felt right to put these moments back in. They weren't kept off *Gravity* deliberately, it's just that those songs were written in a way that didn't call for those moments. They would have been so out of place. This time around, I think seven out of ten songs have solos, which meant Padge got his moments to shine. The 'Parasite' solo is pretty much as I heard it on the demo Padge sent back, he did his sections and that was it. Not all solos come out that quickly, but that one felt really natural. There wasn't any overthinking – it was just attack, shred, kill, finish on the one and move into the chorus. It came out very fluid, which is exactly what a great guitar solo should be.

**'Can't Escape The Waves' has an almost tech-metal feel in places.**

**Matt:** I'm not a huge fan of really technical and progressive metal, I find it too complicated! I guess I'm more of a classic "meat and two veg" man when it comes to songs. But that one definitely has its moments. It just so happened that the chorus went into threes very naturally, which doesn't happen a lot. Trying to blend fours and threes can be a bit of a nightmare, it's alright getting into it but coming out can cause a headache a lot of the time. I've gone back to simple techniques, like three staccato stabs to get back into four. That one ended up being one of my favourites musically and lyrically. It's a very poetic song.

**What can you tell us about the amps and guitars we're hearing on the record?**

**Matt:** For the last couple of records we've used Kempers, which have always worked great. We use them live, too. We'll probably never go back to live amps ever again, just because of the ease and logistics. But this time the main rhythm tones came from my Diezel VH4 heads. We isolated a cab, cranked the shit out of it, put a Tube Screamer in front with super high output EMG pickups.

It was nothing complicated – just raw, heavy and intense. There was also a Phase 90 on some half dirty tones for that wobbly effect and a Slash Octave Fuzz, which we put underneath the rhythms when we needed a heavier tone on songs like My Reverie. It's really subtle and hard to hear, but when you take it away you realise just how much low-end and fuzz it adds underneath. Oh, and I used a DigiTech Whammy for the first time on Knives and Paralysed.

**Padge:** I think I used the Kemper Soldano profile for my leads. It sounded a bit smoother to my ears. We shot out a couple of guitars, but Matt's black Les Paul Custom sounded the best. It just beat everything else, every time. There's a wah-wah on most of my solos, and that came from a Morley Bad Horsie. That was it, really. Just standard stuff, but used effectively!

# GRIM RHYTHMS

WITH AN UNORTHODOX TWO-GUITAR ATTACK AND A MOUNTAIN OF GEAR, A BAND IN MOURNING CREATED A MONUMENTAL DOUBLE ALBUM. THIS IS HOW **MASTODON** DUG DEEP, ACCORDING TO GUITARIST **BILL KELLIHER**. WORDS BY **AMIT SHARMA**. PHOTO BY **CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE**.

When it comes to earth-conquering riffage and head-crushing psychedelic warfare, Mastodon are seasoned masters of their trade. From the sludgy brutality heard on 2002 debut *Remission* to their more progressive exploits in recent years, they've continually conjured a perfect storm of left-field tunings and time signatures and harmonies that stun. Similar things can be said of the 15 tracks that make up the band's new double album *Hushed And Grim*, which features some truly inspired fretwork from Bill Kelliher and Brent Hinds.

As ever, it's the interplay between the two guitarists that separates Mastodon from their peers. And this time it feels like they've capitalised on their twin-guitar assault to the absolute fullest. Speaking with us from his home in Atlanta, Kelliher talks about the mountain of gear used on the new recordings and explains how, after losing long-time friend and manager Nick John, the quartet turned the grief of into a colossal work of art…

**There's a lot to take in over 15 sprawling tracks. How do you even begin to envisage music with that much detail?**

It's like an onion, with a lot of layers. Every time you listen to it there will be something new. With the past couple of records I've really been diving deep with the material I'm scraping out. As I'm getting older, I've become better at getting out the crazy ideas going around in my head. It's very therapeutic to get them out into a tangible space, like on a record, so they can get out of my head! For example, with 'Sultan's Curse' [from 2017 album *Emperor Of Sand*], I had one of the riffs from many years before, but I could never finish the song. I get anxiety about riffs because I know they are great but sometimes I might not have found a place for them. It's cathartic to get it out.

**It sounds like you really went on a tone hunt with this album!**

The problem I have with most amps is that the clean is Beach Boys clean! It cuts your head off like glass and there's no sustain. That's not me, I can't play through that. The channels sound totally different to each other. So I'm more into using the distorted channel and then turning the gain all the way back.

I own a few 800s. I travel a lot so tend to find them on Craigslist and buy them from people. They all sound different, even before you get into switching tubes and everything. This one in particular I am never going to sell because it sounds so great. It lives in my studio and bands that come in to record use it all the time. It just has this great tone. That's what I used for the heavy stuff.

For the cleans, I had a Fender Vibro-King that had three ten-inch speakers, plus built-in tremolo and reverb. I actually bought it from Duane Denison from The Jesus Lizard and Tomahawk. He's a friend of mine and I saw he put it up for sale on Facebook for $700. I text him immediately saying, 'Bro, take that down, I will buy it without trying it out!' Firstly, because he's one of the greatest guitar players alive. And secondly, because I knew it would sound great. I hadn't owned any Fenders prior to that. It had the nicest country twang to it.

**Well, you've been dialling in those kinds of sounds more and more over the years…**

Yeah, while we were recording *Emperor Of Sand*, there were a plethora of amps there. There was a section in 'Roots Remain' that sounded evil and I needed that clinky, twangy Fender tone. I looked around the room to find the ugliest amp and found a Sears Silvertone with the big fat knobs. It looked like a cardboard box and the head slots into the back of the amp, with sliders to stop it falling out, like something from an old German submarine. As soon as I heard it, I knew I had to own one.

I tracked one down a few years ago. The natural reverb is so good. I think it was made around the mid-'60s or early '70s. I used that for clean stuff as well. I tend to use a lot of tremolo, reverbs, octavers, pitch-shifters and delay. I don't think we used the same pedal twice, we'd just keep trying more and more out until we found the right one. There was a blue Boss pitch-shifter that I haven't used much before which had a million different settings. There was one which does this weird slow dive-bomb bend, and that got used on 'Gobblers Of Dregs'.

**Which of the riffs are you most proud of?**

One of my favourites is 'Eyes Of The Serpents', which is something I wrote early on. I was in this weird headspace where I was hitting my head against the wall and felt I couldn't write anything. So I tuned my strings differently – to drop C but with my first string tuned to C and my second string tuned to Ab. It had this weird sound to it where I could ring different strings out.

I kept finding new cool things with it, with almost this cowboy kinda vibe on the opening riff, especially with the tremolo and reverb. It sounded Spaghetti Western-ish. Its working title was 'The Fabulous World Of Bill Kelliher's Boots'! Right near the end of the song, five minutes in, there's this chug part that I'm really proud of. I've never really written anything like it. Brann actually said, "James Hetfield would like that riff!" I didn't know if he was making fun of me [*laughs*]. It's a great riff in between some cool vocal patterns, Thin Lizzy harmonies plus a killer solo from Brent.

**The way you employ those clashing notes for dissonance, quite often using open strings, is what brings a lot of that extra depth to the riffs.**

We love our dissonance, for sure! Almost everything I write has an open note somewhere. It's like putting a bell on the end of your riffs. Especially when you're tuned down to A, you hit the low string and then pop the high octave… It just sings, like putting an exclamation point at the end of your riff. *Bong!*

It's an interesting effect because the low string will wobble but the high string will stay tight and in tune. You get this weird dissonance doing things like that, even if it's the same note an octave up. That's one of our signature things, as well as using notes that are a half step away to get this awkward and gritty sound… It's like chewing down on some aluminium foil. It makes you pull that weird face and freak out.

That's what I'm trying to recreate on the guitar. I will search until I find these little exclamation points I can throw in. There's always something that will work, depending on what mood you're going for… In our case, it's usually sad and evil!

# THE ROYAL TREATMENT

SIX-STRING HEAVYWEIGHT **ERIC GALES** DISCUSSES HIS TRIUMPHANT NEW ALBUM, *CROWN*, AND HIS JOURNEY TO ULTIMATE BLUES SALVATION.

WORDS BY **ANDY ALEDOR**. PHOTO BY **JEFF FASANO**.

Eric Gales, heralded as one of the greatest blues and rock guitarists of his generation, has lived a life of soaring heights alongside deep, dark lows. Since 1991, the Memphis-born Gales has redefined the language of blues guitar with stunning virtuosity and on-the-edge musical daring, combining the influences of Albert King and Jimi Hendrix with an infusion of the harmonically complex sounds of jazz and classical music, all delivered with a combination of emotional intensity and masterful precision.

Over the course of 30 years and 18 albums, his passion for the guitar and his boundless desire to keep his music vital has never waned. But like so many before him, the track of his career was derailed numerous times due to substance abuse. "I put myself in the backseat through my drug addiction," Gales says candidly. In 2009, he hit bottom and served time at Shelby County Correctional Center outside of Memphis for possession of drugs and a weapon.

Now five years sober, a rejuvenated Gales is set to release *Crown*, the strongest album of his career in terms of songwriting, singing and his signature explosive guitar playing. Produced by Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith, *Crown* showcases Gales sharing his feelings of positivity and dedication as well as his reflections on the fraught state of the world today.

**Many of these tracks touch your personal struggles, as well as the nature of the world today.**

My brother Eugene, who was with me in the original Eric Gales Band, was my mentor. He taught me that the best thing I can do is to write about what I know about. I could make up something, but there's no better material than personal experience. There's a world out there that's being heavily consumed by addiction, of many types and many forms. I think it is a large enough subject for the world to relate to – if not directly through one's own struggles, then indirectly through the struggles of those around us. Many of us have close family members or best friends that are going through the stuff I am talking about.

Now, there's that stuff. But there is also a heavy cloud that's been hanging over the United States for quite some time in regards to race relations and the politics of race relations. I was overly compelled to touch on things of that nature because the day before we started writing for this record was the day George Floyd died. That event, as we all know, caused a cataclysmic, epic circumstance of events that not only affected Minnesota, it affected the USA. And let's go bigger than that: it affected the entire world. To look on CNN and see people across the globe saying, "I've had enough of this," I think George Floyd's death brought attention to other countries that have been dealing with the same issues forever.

To see Canada, France, England, Germany – everywhere – I have never in my life known of something to affect the entire world in this way. This was an event that unified the world in saying, "I'm tired of this, and something has got to be done about it." I would say that 40 to 50 percent of the material on this record came from things that have happened to me, but I was too high in my own mind to even realise that I had been confronted with things of that nature. Now is the time to talk about it. These things need to be addressed, and I need to let people know that I have a platform to get a message to people that I think they should hear.

**What are you thinking about in the moments before you deliver your musical message to an audience?**

Truth be told, I don't think about it beforehand at all. It comes to me the moment I step up to the mic. I believe my role is to transmit this energy that's coming through me from a higher being, and to do my best for it to be accepted the way I am giving it. There's no preparation for that. I have no intention to try to force something down someone's throat; no matter how much I might take a stand on how I feel things are dissatisfactory for minorities, it doesn't deserve to be pushed down someone's throat, and I try to be aware of that. By the time I'm done playing, my only goal is for the audience to understand very well what it is I am saying, who it is meant for, and my reasons for saying it in the first place.

The people that come to my shows, they don't come to hear me talk about that, and I understand that; they come to hear me play. But I have manifested a way to integrate my conversation about my platform without it turning into something overly political. That is a dog-and-pony show in and of itself. I would rather speak from my own experiences and shed some enlightenment if I can.

I met someone after a show the other day that said to me, "I'm so glad that my friend brought me to this show, because it opened my eyes to a whole style of music that I had no idea about." As great as it is to touch the people who may have never heard me but come with an open mind, I honestly want the people who come with a closed mind. If the energy that drives me connects with that person with the closed mind, then their mind will really be blown, because they showed up with their arms crossed in front of them but left with their arms wide open.

**Playing blues is all about expressing your emotions. Has becoming sober changed the way you play and the way you feel about the genre?**

I thought in my high-getting days that I was playing some of the most dope-est shit ever. But when I decided to put everything I could into sobriety, I was very afraid as to whether I'd still be able to tap into what I thought was "it", only to find out that I've been shutting myself off for 30-something years! The connection I feel now is as raw and authentic as it could ever be and supersedes by a million miles anything I could do while I was high.

It's incredible, the barometer for emotional intertwinement that I feel now, and that's true whether I'm in front of a crowd or just sitting at home playing acoustic guitar. I can go to crying, and I live for that now. I could just look at a guitar and almost start crying! [*Laughs*] I have never been more in touch with myself than I am now. The five percent that I used to tap into is nothing compared to the 10,000 percent that I can tap into now that the fog has lifted.

**You also have a new signature model guitar from Magneto Guitars, the RD3.**

A few years ago, Magneto came out with the RawDawg guitar, but it was in the range of $4,500. This time, we decided to make it more consumer-friendly without sacrificing any of the quality or the materials, and it'll be around $1,250. The new one feels exactly the same as the one I've been playing. It's an incredible guitar. The first 20 will be sold exclusively through [my website]. I plan to do a bundle package with the album, the guitar, my MXR Raw Dawg pedal and my DV Mark signature amplifier, which is a hybrid tube/transistor and runs at 250 watts. I run two or four at a time and it sounds incredible!

# KINGPIN OF THE BLUES

## JOE BONAMASSA RETURNS WITH *TIME CLOCKS*, HIS STRONGEST AND MOST DIVERSE ALBUM TO DATE – AND DISCUSSES HIS NEWFOUND ROLE AS THIS YEAR'S FOREMOST BLUES/ROCK IMPRESARIO.

WORDS BY **ANDY ALEDORT**. PHOTO BY **JEFF FASANO**.

Joe Bonamassa – calling in from "Nerdville," his home in Nashville – has just released *Time Clocks*, his 15th solo album, on his own J&R Adventures label. About the new record, Bonamassa says, "What started out with the intention of being a trio record turned into probably my most adventurous and involved record."

His producer, Kevin 'Caveman' Shirley, adds, "I think Joe has made an album that is truly transitional, from a blues musician to a superstar artist. I'm so thrilled to be along for the ride." Bonamassa and Shirley brought the legendary Bob Clearmountain onboard to mix the tracks.

But Bonamassa hasn't confined his energies to writing, recording, touring and melting faces. He's also a co-founder of the Keeping The Blues Alive foundation, which functions both as a record label and a charity for struggling musicians. In June 2020, he worked with Dion on the *Blues And Friends* album, featuring luminaries such as Van Morrison, Jeff Beck, Paul Simon and Bruce Springsteen, while also producing albums for Reese Wynans, Joanne Shaw Taylor, Joanna Connor, Beth Hart and – with the upcoming release of *Crown* – Eric Gales.

**When did you start working on *Time Clocks*, and how did it come together?**

A lot of my records have "themes", and the theme here was that I wanted to make a "New York" record. When I record in Nashville, I snap my fingers and a cartage truck brings every possible guitar/amp combo to the studio. But we were at Germano's [the old Hit Factory] in New York, and I was forced to use just a few pieces of gear and a couple of guitars, and it changed the entire vibe and recording process. This was like, "I want a screwdriver, a hammer," and that equated to a reissue Nocaster, a 1968 Telecaster with a Parsons/White B-bender, a 1954 Strat, a 1959 sunburst Les Paul, a 1961 dot-neck ES-335, a 1965 Rickenbacker 360 12-string, a Martin acoustic and one brown Deluxe and one blackface Deluxe Reverb.

I had been booked to play Love Rocks New York [an annual charity concert at the Beacon Theater] so I had a high-powered Twin flown in for that, and it ended up on the record in a few spots, too. The freedom of no gear encouraged the feeling of more creativity.

**You use the B-bender on the title track.**

It's been a really great tool. I was playing through both Deluxes along with a Schaffer wireless replica, like the one Angus Young uses, as a boost. I'm surprised the Deluxes survived because I was running them hard.

**Were all the songs written specifically for this record?**

Two songs were left over from the *Royal Tea* excursion last year, which are 'The Royal Kind', which I wrote with Bernie Marsden, and 'Time Clocks', which I'd forgotten about. The entire song was in my voice memos as 'TC demo', so I just copied the lyrics from what I thought I said. A free one! All of the other songs were written in my apartment in NYC before the sessions with my friend James House from Nashville. Everything was cut "three-piece" – guitar/bass/drums – in New York, and then Kevin added singers, keyboards, didgeridoo, etcetera, in Sydney, Australia. Jeff Bova, who we've been working with for 15 years, added all of the strings. It was a strange way to make a record but it worked out well.

**Tell me about the two opening tracks, 'Pilgrimage' and 'Notches'.**

Kevin wanted me to open the record with an instrumental, and he had heard 'Notches', which I'd written with Charlie Starr [Blackberry Smoke]. Jeff Bova, with Kevin's direction, created an instrumental track and I soloed over it. 'Notches' started with this lick I wrote, influenced by Ali Farka Touré and Moroccan music. Charlie had the opening lines of the chorus, *"I've got miles under my wheels and notches in my walking cane."* The song wrote itself in about 15 minutes around the lick and the vibe of that chorus.

**It's clear that you're as interested in elements of pop and creative musical twists as you are with getting a great guitar sound and laying down great parts.**

I wrote 'Curtain Call' with James House, and songwriting is the last frontier for me. You can do your best to recreate your favourite sounds, and recreate a vibe, but far more important is pushing yourself to write better songs. The more you push on the front part of the record, the more joyous it is to record the actual record itself. You know the songs are strong; you aren't thinking, "Well, let's just put more reverb on it – maybe that will help!" "Let's flange the chorus!" You can try to mask the problems in the writing with studio tricks, but that does not work. Also, the better the song, the more fun it is to play live and the better everything is.

**Can you look at this record objectively and observe that your songwriting and playing has changed?**

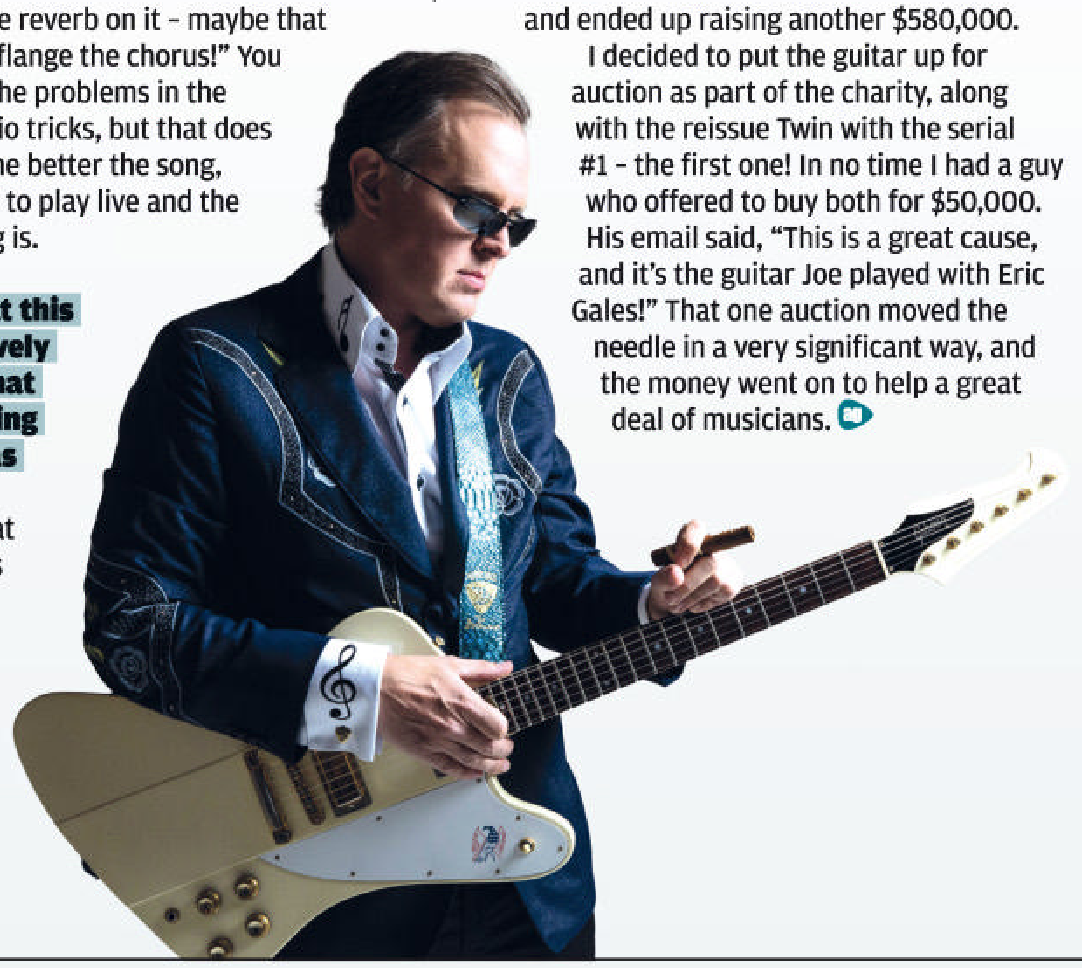
I would say that becoming friends with the writers in Nashville and learning how they put stuff together has helped a lot. Overall in the last year and a half, I've written more songs than I have in my entire life because I had three records to deal with, starting with [Eric Gales'] record [*Crown*], and then we did a Jimmy Hall record that will come out next year, and also there was my record. Having the opportunity to write for other people gave me a better grasp of writing for my own records. I found that I really like writing with other people in mind, because you can detach all the hangups you might have about yourself, like, "I don't know if I can sing this and hit those notes." But Jimmy Hall can!

**Can you describe Keeping The Blues Alive?**

Keeping The Blues Alive is something we put together in June 2020 to release albums I produce or co-produce, but it's also a fundraising organisation to help musicians. One of the coolest things to come out of that jam I did on the cruise with Eric was that the guitar I used was custom-built for me by Gibson. It is a replica of one of my 1960 Les Pauls and it features my name inlaid in the fingerboard. I thought it would be cool to auction off the guitar, combined with one of my reissue high-powered Fender Twins, as a way to raise funds for the charity. Up until last year, we'd raised about $600,000-700,000 that went toward music programs in schools.

Once [COVID-19] hit, I thought we should expand the charity to help the many, many musicians – and other people connected to the live music industry – who were forced to lose their gigs and just sit at home with bills to pay and no income. So we started an offshoot called Fueling Musicians, offering monetary assistance to musicians and crew people, and it's been a huge success. Everyone from Guitar Center to Chicago Music Exchange, Ernie Ball, Gibson, they all kicked in some money, and we did some stream-a-thons and ended up raising another $580,000.

I decided to put the guitar up for auction as part of the charity, along with the reissue Twin with the serial #1 – the first one! In no time I had a guy who offered to buy both for $50,000. His email said, "This is a great cause, and it's the guitar Joe played with Eric Gales!" That one auction moved the needle in a very significant way, and the money went on to help a great deal of musicians.



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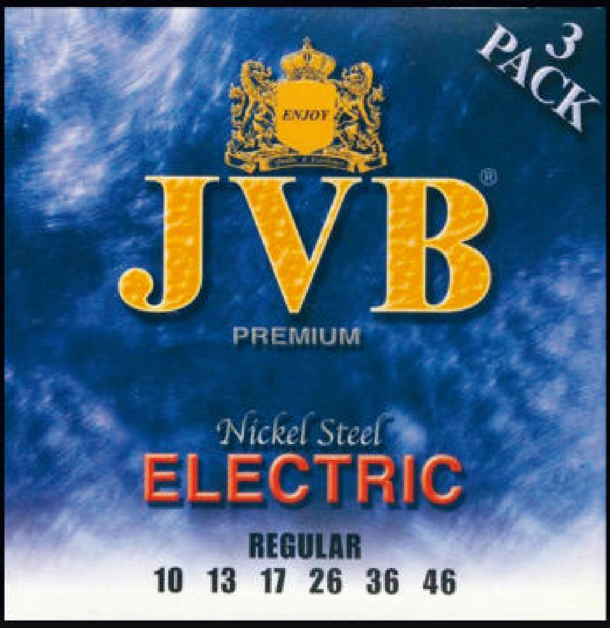

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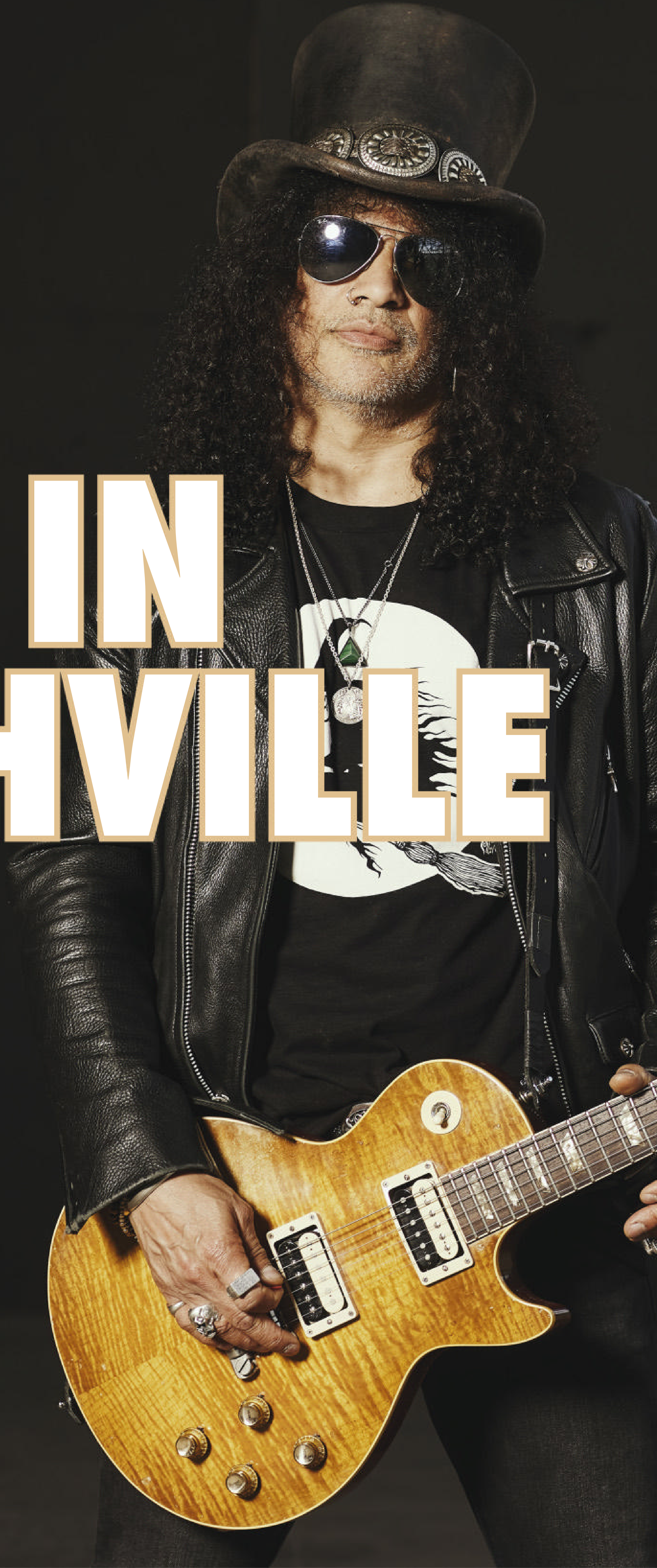
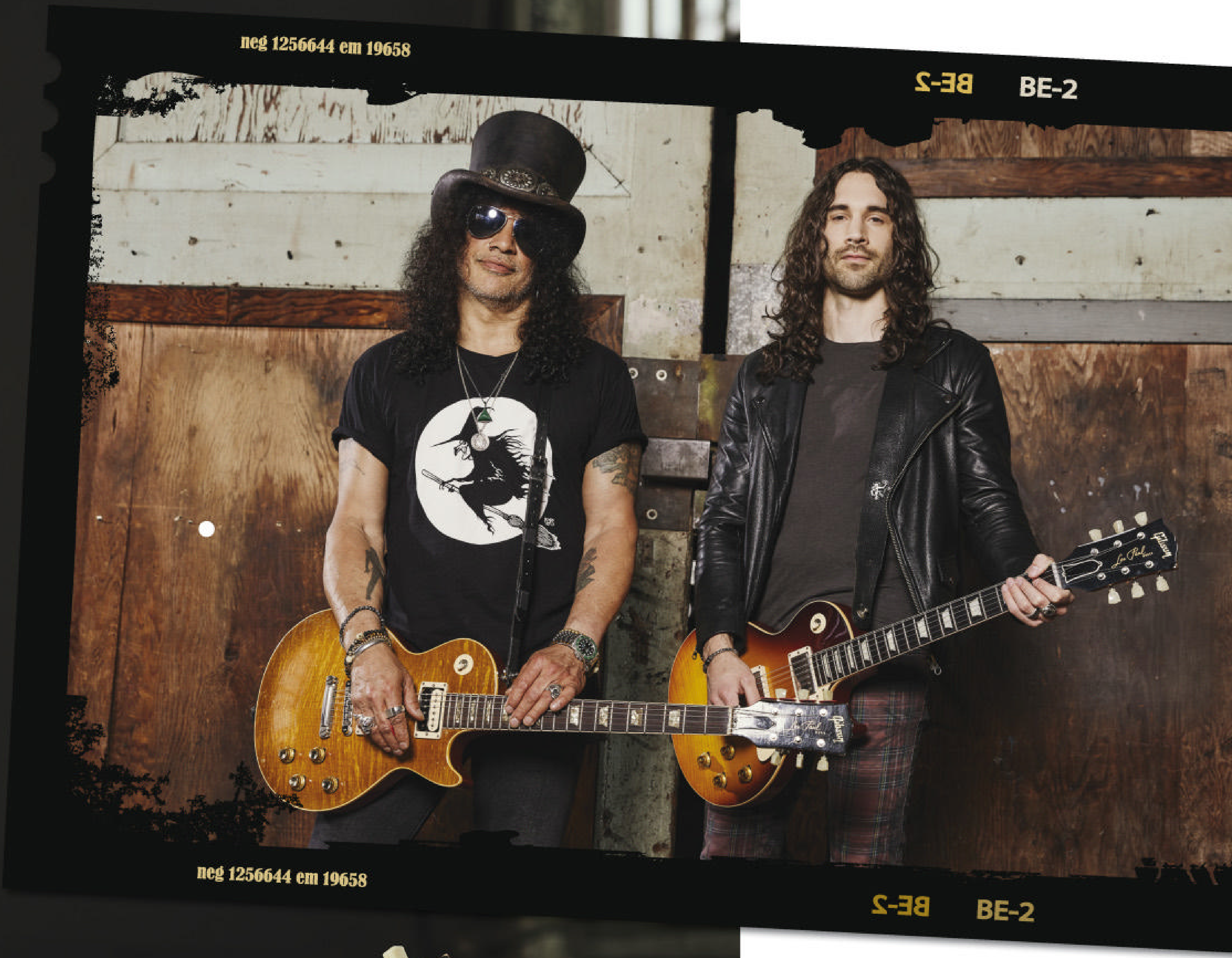


# LIVE IN NASHVILLE

FOR HIS LANDMARK FOURTH ALBUM WITH **MYLES KENNEDY** AND **THE CONSPIRATORS** (BLUNTLY TITLED *4*), **SLASH** TOOK AN AMBITIOUS LEAP INTO NEW TERRITORY.

*AUSTRALIAN GUITAR* CAUGHT UP WITH THE MODERN-DAY GREAT TO RIFF ON THE OLD-SCHOOL INFLUENCE THAT DROVE ITS PRODUCTION, ALL THE DROOL-WORTHY GEAR THAT WENT INTO IT, AND WHY – THANKS, ODDLY ENOUGH, TO THE PANDEMIC – A FIFTH ALBUM MIGHT COME WAY SOONER THAN ANY OF US EXPECT.

WORDS BY **MATT DORIA**.
PHOTOS BY **AUSTIN NELSON**.




In modern guitar music, there's one name that can make even the staunchest of old-school apologists admit that rock 'n' roll is, in fact, alive and well. That name – as you may have guessed from the giant picture of him to your right, the steadfirst or, well, the very cover of this issue – is Slash. Though he's an undisputed king of hard-rock's golden age, thanks in no short part to his historic tenure in Guns N' Roses (who also have a new record out soon, the rarity-studded *Hard Skool* EP), Slash has remained one of the most relevant shredders on the prowl by virtue of a solo album slate packed from top to bottom with ferocious riffs and mind-bending solos.

The current era of Slash supremacy started ten years ago, with the landmark release of *Apocalyptic Love*. His second "official" solo album, following 2010's eponymous overdose on cameos, the record marked his full-length collaboration with Myles Kennedy (of Alter Bridge fame) and an outfit of thrashy, mosh-weathered misfits dubbed The Conspirators. It wasn't the most unpredictable pairing – the *Slash* album featured 14 guests, Kennedy of whom was the only one to pop up twice – but critics by and large assumed that 2012's *Apocalyptic Love* would be a one-and-done affair for "Slash featuring Myles

Kennedy and The Conspirators"…

Then came 2014's *World On Fire*… Then 2018's *Living The Dream*… And now, in just a couple of weeks, there'll be *4*. The record's ultra-blunt title is a reference to where it sits in the Conspirators' catalogue, but it also nods to the downright astonishing rawness and bold authenticity it revels in. Slash and co. recorded it live to tape in Nashville, with key solos and some of its strongest riffs minted just hours before they hit the decks. At the core of its concept lies one Mr. Dave Cobb, the veteran producer best known for his work with country stars like Chris Stapleton, Brandi Carlile and Sturgill Simpson (as well as the soundtrack for 2018's *A Star Is Born*).

So, why did Slash – a hard-as-nails rock 'n' roller in mind, body and soul – team up with the man whose best efforts are a far cry from the pyrotechnic shreddage of his client's bread and butter? Well, in true Slash spirit, he did so for a challenge. After all, the man's been cutting sick on six strings for over 40 years at this point – it was about time he took a switchblade to the status quo.

And thanks in no short part to its ambitious log-line, *4* is, in its final form, one of Slash's most impressive efforts. Whether it be via the swampy, groove-laden sizzle of 'April Fool', the pop-leaning prickliness of 'Fill My World' or the grandiose sitar work on 'Spirit Love' – not to mention the use of a talk box on 'C'est La Vie', which sounds questionable on paper, but winds up being one of the record's best passages – there's plenty on *4* that'll get your toes tapping, head nodding, and horns raised high.

Ahead of its crash-landing on February 11th, Slash told Australian Guitar all about the making of his most daring album yet.

**What's going down in the studio today?**

Just jamming. I'm always in the studio making up stuff. [The pandemic has] been going since March of last year, right? Since then I've just been in the studio, writing and recording and, y'know, just doing *stuff*.

**Surely you've got a solid three or four more albums worth of content by now?**

Well, I definitely have a lot of new material. This record that's coming out right now [*4*], the majority of it was written on the road in 2019, but there's a few songs that were written during the pandemic. But I've also written a shitload of other stuff, which will probably present itself on the next record. It's hard to figure out the timing of all that. But then I've also been working on Guns N' Roses stuff, and there's been outside projects too. There's just been a lot of different things going on – it's been busy!

**Especially after how batshit crazy things have been for the past two years, how does it feel to be on the precipice of unleashing *4* into the wild?**

Well to be totally honest, we've been sitting on it since April. So I'm really, really f***ing excited about finally getting it out. You get a little anxious, just waiting to put a record out for this amount of time. I've never done that before. We went in to record the album, and then because of different schedules and stuff like that, we knew that when the record was finished, it wasn't going to come out until next year. We just had to sort of bite the bullet on that. But it was good that we recorded the album when we did it.

**David Cobb is obviously known a lot more for his country stuff than his rock 'n' roll. What made you gravitate towards Dave and his style of production?**

Obviously nobody would call me a country enthusiast, but I do have a sincere appreciation for the country music of old. And the new stuff that Dave has been doing is actually some of the most down-to-earth and sincere country music I've heard in a long time.

I listened to his country stuff when his name came up, but he also produces a band called Rival Sons, which is a rock 'n' roll band that I think sounds really good. The Conspirators have done a few shows with those guys, but I first heard them on the radio, and they just sounded like a really f***ing good sounding rock 'n' roll band.

So out of the small handful of producers I was looking at, Dave definitely seemed to be the most promising. And then he and I talked on the phone, and we just started getting into this whole concept of recording live in the studio. That's all he had to say to me, and I was like, "Yes, that's what I want to do! I've been trying to do that since 1987!" I've always wanted to do an album live in the room, so that was the clincher for me.

> **"THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME I WAS ABLE TO SET THE AMP UP NEXT TO THE DRUM KIT AND JUST STAND IN FRONT OF IT WITH THE REST OF THE GUYS, AND JUST PLAY. THAT WAS AN UNPRECEDENTED, F***IN' PINNACLE MOMENT FOR ME."**

**So that loose, in-the-room feel this record has – was that the plan from day one?**

Oh yeah. Like as soon as Dave brought it up, y'know, that was it. We went down to his studio, we set up in the morning of the first day of recording, and then we just jammed in this room like we would in a club. And we wrote and recorded the album in five days. It was f***ing great, man.

The thing is – especially as we get further down the road [with production techniques] and technology gets more and more advanced – the idea of having an amplifier in the same room that the drums are in, it's just unheard of. Any engineer will laugh at you if you bring it up. But y'know, most rock records from back in the day, they were pretty much all recorded that way. In some way, shape or form, those bands were just guys in a room, maybe with their amps off to the side or whatever, but all recording at the same time.

In '87, when Guns N' Roses did *Appetite For Destruction*, we recorded that whole album live, but I *hated* wearing headphones. That was always the big issue for me, having the headphones on and then playing. I would never understand what the guitar sounded like with the headphones on, so I would have to go into the control room and do the guitars in there, with the sound coming through the monitors – that way I could feel it more.

So this was the first time I was able to set the amp up next to the drum kit and just stand in front of it with the rest of the guys, and just *play*. That was an unprecedented, f***in' pinnacle moment for me.

**It really captures the spirit of rock 'n' roll, which is that raw, spontaneous energy. Above all, it's *human*.**

Well, that's really the whole point of it. And y'know, I make it sound like a big deal, but it's not. It's not that big of a deal, all things considered. But the reason I wanted to do it that way is because for me, when I got into [playing rock music], I was always turned on by rock 'n' roll bands that had that kind of spirit.

My first real record collection was made up solely of live records, because I didn't have a lot of money to buy entire bands' catalogs, and a lot of these bands I wasn't that familiar with. So I would get the live records – which they used to have a lot of in the '70s – and I would get a great idea of what a band's catalog sounded like. But more importantly, it was the energy of the band delivering [their art] in the moment. That's always what's turned me on, and so the farther you get away from that, the less exciting it all becomes for me.

**What is your all-time favourite live record?**

My all-time favourite live record is Aerosmith's *Live! Bootleg*. That's a f***ing raw, sloppy, Grace monitor live record. But there are so many other ones, too. I loved *Got Live If You Want It!* and *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out!* [both by The Rolling Stones]. *Live At Leeds* [by The Who] was great, too. And the *Double Live Gonzo!* record from Ted Nugent… Also, Woodstock. And a lot of the random Jeff Beck and Jimi Hendrix concerts that I got a hold of bootlegs from, they were really cool.

I can go on and on. Queen's *Live Killers* was great. Thin Lizzy's *Live And Dangerous* was great. There was a Nazareth live record, too! And all of those records, they just… Y'know, you really get that energy from the band, in realtime, doing what it is that they do together. And that's what's always turned me on. So I think that has a lot to do with my obsession to be able to capture that in the studio [on *4*].

**Do you reckon that process led to this record being a little more collaborative than normal, too, being able to really bounce off of each other and play to each other's strengths in the moment?**

Playing off of each other in the moment is definitely key, right? But the way that we worked on this record, when we went into the studio to actually record it, we didn't have as much time to do pre-production as we normally do. We usually spend a good, solid few weeks hashing out the arrangements, rehearsing and getting it all really, really, really tight – which is great, because then you go in the studio and just bang it out – but we sort of didn't have that, this time around.

We went in with arrangements that were half done, three quarters done, and we put them together in their final form in the moment – literally when we were recording the song. Like

Gibson
Les Paul

the first single, 'The River Is Rising' – we had a complete arrangement for that, but as we played it, Dave was going, "Y'know, that end bit is so f***ing cool, could we put it somewhere else in the song too, so you have it more than once?" And I was like, "Yeah, we can do that," and I just started doing a guitar solo over it. That kind of collaboration started to happen very spontaneously in the studio.

**What's your philosophy when it comes to improv in general?**

I like to get in the studio and get out [*laughs*]. On this record, probably moreso than any of the other ones, I just pretty much improvised *everything.* And because we were putting the arrangements together so quickly, there were a couple of moments where we did things in the studio that I hadn't done before.

There were some harmonies that came together for a song called 'Fall Back To The Earth' that didn't exist before, that I made up on the spot right before we actually recorded the song. A lot of the guitar solos were just various kinds of spontaneous things. I didn't sit down and work on stuff – y'know, I didn't sit cross-legged on the floor and try to figure out parts and do that kind of thing. I don't have the patience.

**I mean, not to blow smoke, but you're f***ing Slash, man. You don't *need* to spend hours mathematically hashing out a solo.**

That's very sweet of you to say, but the thing is, I just really don't have the aptitude for thinking too hard or working too hard on a solo. I don't know – the energy and spontaneity is the key to making a solo fun or interesting. I work too hard on something, I lose all the pizzazz out of it.

**You have literally *hundreds* of guitars. How do you decide what to take with you into the studio?**

Usually it's whatever guitars I have around at the moment. For this particular record, I had a couple of really cool '59 [Les Paul] reissues that I got during the pandemic, and a '69 reissue Flying V that I got for Christmas last year. Then I had a black Les Paul from the Custom Shop that I just got – that sounded really good – and the "Victoria" Goldtop that I've been using a lot lately. Those were the guitars that were in the studio during the pandemic, so I was using those for demos and whatnot. When it came to pre-production, I just pulled those guitars out and started playing with them.

Apart from those, I have my trusty Derrig guitar as well. So when we went to the studio, we took the Derrig, plus all those other guitars I just mentioned, and a sitar. I ended up doing the majority of the songs on the Derrig because it just has this *thing* about it when you play it. It's really hard for any other guitar to follow it – it just has, for me personally, what would be considered the sound that I feel comfortable with.

But I did end up using the two '59 reissues. One of them worked out great for a song called 'The Path Less Followed', and then I used the Flying V for 'C'est La Vie' and 'Actions Speak Louder Than Words'. The Flying V is a great sounding guitar! It's funny, because I don't play them that often, but this one just sounded *great.* And it plays really good. It's clean – it's a lot cleaner than a regular Les Paul, so for a song like 'C'est La Vie', with the talk box, it was perfect. And for that kind of bluesy lick on the intro for 'Actions Speak Louder Than Words'.

I used the Black Beauty for 'Call Off The Dogs', because it's just such a raunchy sounding guitar, it was perfect for that song. And then I used the other '59 reissue – which I'm definitely going to be taking on the road with me – for 'April Fool'. So y'know, all things considered, I used a few different guitars. But to get back to your original question, I pick the guitars that I happen to be comfortable with during the period that covers when we go into rehearsals.

I might have a specific idea for a specific guitar, and in those cases I'll go find the guitar in my collection and pull that out. This sitar was one of those things – I knew I was going to put a sitar in the intro of ['Spirit Love'], so I brought it with me to Nashville.

**Was that the first time you've ever tracked a sitar for a record?**

Yeah, that was it. I've had that sitar since the mid-'90s, and I've just never used it – mostly because it's hard to not sound very cliché when you use a sitar. But I just cranked it through my Marshall, and it was such a good part for that sort of Eastern sound. But through the Marshall, it just sounds like something is dying [*laughs*]. It worked out pretty well.

**I f***ing love that talk box riff on 'C'est La Vie' as well – where did that come from?**

That was one of the songs that was written on the road during The Conspirators' tour in 2019. I was listening back over the board tapes – what we do is, I'll bring a riff to soundcheck and we'll start jamming it there, and the front-of-house team will record it, then I'll get all of those tapes back at the end of the tour just to have as a reference for when we go in to start the next record. And so during the pandemic, I listened to all of those tapes from the last tour. When we were in South America, every soundcheck, we'd be putting together that song, 'C'est La Vie'.

It was just a riff I came up with – I don't even remember where it started. It was actually a little bit of a tricky riff to write, to be able to execute it every time. But Myles came up with this great lyric, and we had a good 50 percent of the song written by the time I started making the demos, so I just put a basic arrangement together and sent it to Myles. He remembered the lyric, so it all came together from there.

**When it comes to writing on tour, do you find that being in a different city every night inspires you to try different things and be more creative?**

I think it's actually more out of necessity, because there's not a lot of other time that I'm able to work on something in earnest. When The Conspirators are on the road and I'm sitting around in buses and hotels and dressing rooms, I always have my guitar with me. If I'm working on a Conspirators record, the best time to do it is during a Conspirators tour, because when that tour is over, I'm gonna have to shift gears and do Guns N' Roses, and *that's* where my head is.

**So did the pandemic change the way that you approached writing, or give you the ability to lock into different ideas?**

Yeah. Truth be told, the pandemic forced this kind of awareness towards being patient. I mean, I've had to learn about patience gradually over the years anyway, but the pandemic really put things in a different perspective. I started being able to sit down and really work on the material, as opposed to just sort of rushing through it – even though if I was putting together a demo, it would have to be done within a day. I still can't spend two days on something [*laughs*]. But it did give me a sense of patience, y'know, to be a little bit more calm about producing stuff.

**Just as a fan of music, what shit are you vibing right now? What's on *The Official Slash Workout Playlist?***

I don't listen to music during the workout anymore because I do it over Zoom, so I can't have the music on or I won't be able to hear what they're saying [*laughs*]. Anyway. But I've been listening to all kinds of crazy stuff! I've been listening to the entire Meters catalogue, these last few months. During the pandemic, I was listening to a lot of Buddy Guy. I've been listening to a lot of Brent Mason, who's a country pickin' Tele guy – he's just f***ing mind-blowing.

There's so much stuff that I've been listening to. I've been listening to old Stevie Wonder records a lot, and a lot of Sly Stone. Aerosmith's *Night In The Ruts* record was in my car for like a week, and then the new AC/DC record [*Power Up*] was in there for what seemed like an exorbitant amount of time. And then y'know, other odds and ends, whatever.

And a lot of '50s stuff! That was what it was – I was listening to the '50s channel on on Sirius XM, and that was, like, '50s rock 'n' roll songs, from top to bottom, all day long. I was really into it. If you'd ever asked me back in the day, if it wasn't Chuck Berry, I wouldn't know anything about '50s rock 'n' roll. I wasn't really that much of an enthusiast – but nowadays, I f***ing listen to everything. I was just listening to Eddie Cochran!

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Bigger, Badder, Bolder – these are the best three words to describe the ST-9 Pro+ Super Tube. The latest and possibly last incarnation of Maxon's legendary 808, the ST-9 features more output, more gain, and more tonal options for the player who simply needs – well, MORE.

### TOD-9
The Maxon OD-9 circuit has achieved a legendary status among tone connoisseurs as the ultimate tool for driving a tube amp. Yet sometimes you need that little "something extra," and the TOD-9 provides this missing ingredient in spades.

### OD-9
While the OD808 may have been the first overdrive circuit of its kind, it was the OD-9 that cemented this sound in the history of Rock & Roll guitar.

### VOP-9
The VOP-9 was designed with the seasoned guitarist in mind, yet it can be a great addition to any player's rig. It's difficult to put into words what makes the VOP-9 stand out from other OD pedals. In the simplest terms, it accentuates the connection between your guitar and amp rather than getting in the way of it.

**VINTAGE SERIES**

### AD999
A genuine analogue delay with new BBD IC (Maxon MC4107D) installed. It features up to 900msec. of delay time, largely outperforming its predecessor AD900. The AD999 also has two outputs which are for effected signal and dry signal respectively.

### OD8290
The OD820's voltage doubling circuit adds gain, girth and grit without desecrating your existing tone. Imagine the classic 808 sound with more output, more bottom and more drive and you've pretty much summed up the 820's sound.

**REISSUE**

### OD808
The OD808 Reissue offers up all the warm, creamy, organic overdrive as the original and then some. Never one to rest on their laurels, Maxon has tweaked the current version ever so slightly to reduce noise level while retaining the legendary "808" tone.

### PT999
With its single knob, the PT999 Phase Tone looks deceptively simple, yet packed into this tiny blue box is a host of the most authentic 70's-era phasing effects available in a current production unit.

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LEARN TO PLAY

# PASSENGER
## "SWORD FROM THE STONE"

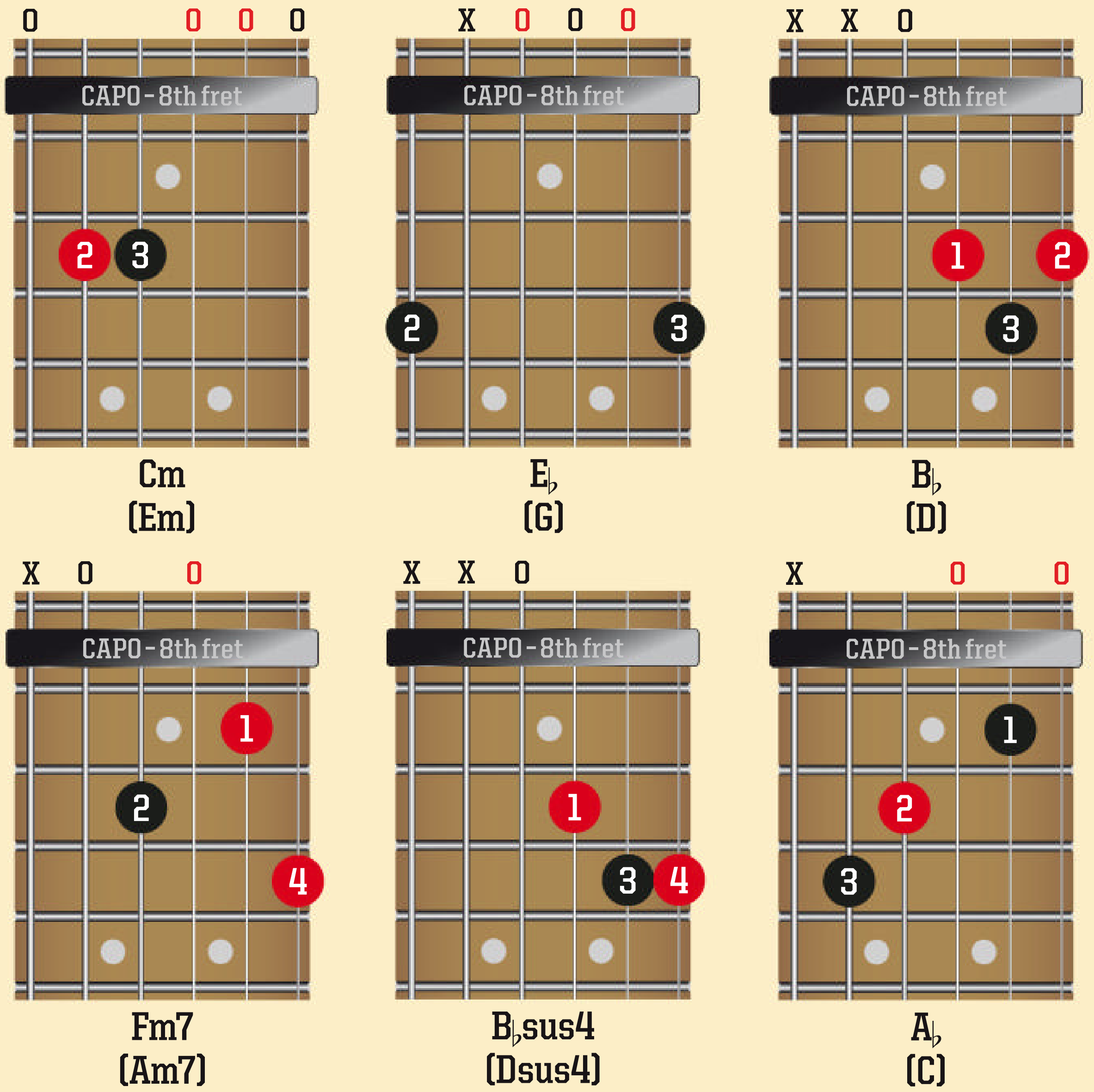
### Mike Rosenberg takes you on a ride up to the dusty end of the fretboard with this capo'd corker

Passenger, aka Mike Rosenberg released the album *Songs For The Drunk And Broken Hearted* to widespread acclaim in 2021. The opening track that we're covering here has a number of remixes, but we're looking at the original album version. Whilst there's a 'gingerbread mix' that was co-produced with Ed Sheeran (you can hear the classic pop hallmarks of Sheeran's style in the production and arrangement) the guitars take the back seat.

The album version features strummed acoustic chords with the capo at the eighth fret. This does mean access is a little tighter than usual (though a narrower capo will give your fingers more fretting room) but the transposed chords sound great higher up the neck. There's also a purely acoustic version that Mike released as part of a standalone project, so it's worth checking out his fingerstyle technique on this, as it's how he usually performs it live.

## CHORDS

Sword From The Stone is a relatively simple strum-along with just a handful of chord shapes, but it's worth bearing in mind that the 8th-fret capo places the song in C minor. The chord names in brackets will help guide you. They denote the names of the shapes if you were playing them in open position – which is how most of us remember the shapes.




SWORD FROM THE STONE
Words and Music by Michael David Rosenberg
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SONGSHEET

# Sword From The Stone

## Intro
Cm E♭ B♭ Fm7
Cm E♭ B♭

## Verse 1
A♭ E♭
Well how ya doing, darling?
B♭ E♭
How you getting on?
A♭ E♭
Any horses running
B♭ Cm B♭
Worth betting on?
A♭ E♭
How's the weather down there?
B♭ E♭ A♭
I hope you're keeping warm

## Verse 2
A♭ E♭
How you feeling, sweetheart?
B♭ E♭
Are you moving on?
A♭ E♭
Are you sleeping okay?
B♭ Cm B♭
Or do the nights go on and on?
A♭ E♭
I hope you're eating well
B♭ E♭ A♭
I hope you're staying strong

## Chorus
Cm E♭ B♭
'Cos I'm fine, then I'm not
Fm7 Cm
I'm spinning round and I can't stop
E♭ B♭
I can't do this alone
Cm E♭ B♭
Time flies and it's so slow
Fm7 Cm
I'm up and down like a yoyo
E♭ B♭
I can't do it on my own
A♭
And I've tried and I can't pull

The sword from the stone

## Interlude
Cm E♭ B♭ Fm7
Cm E♭ B♭

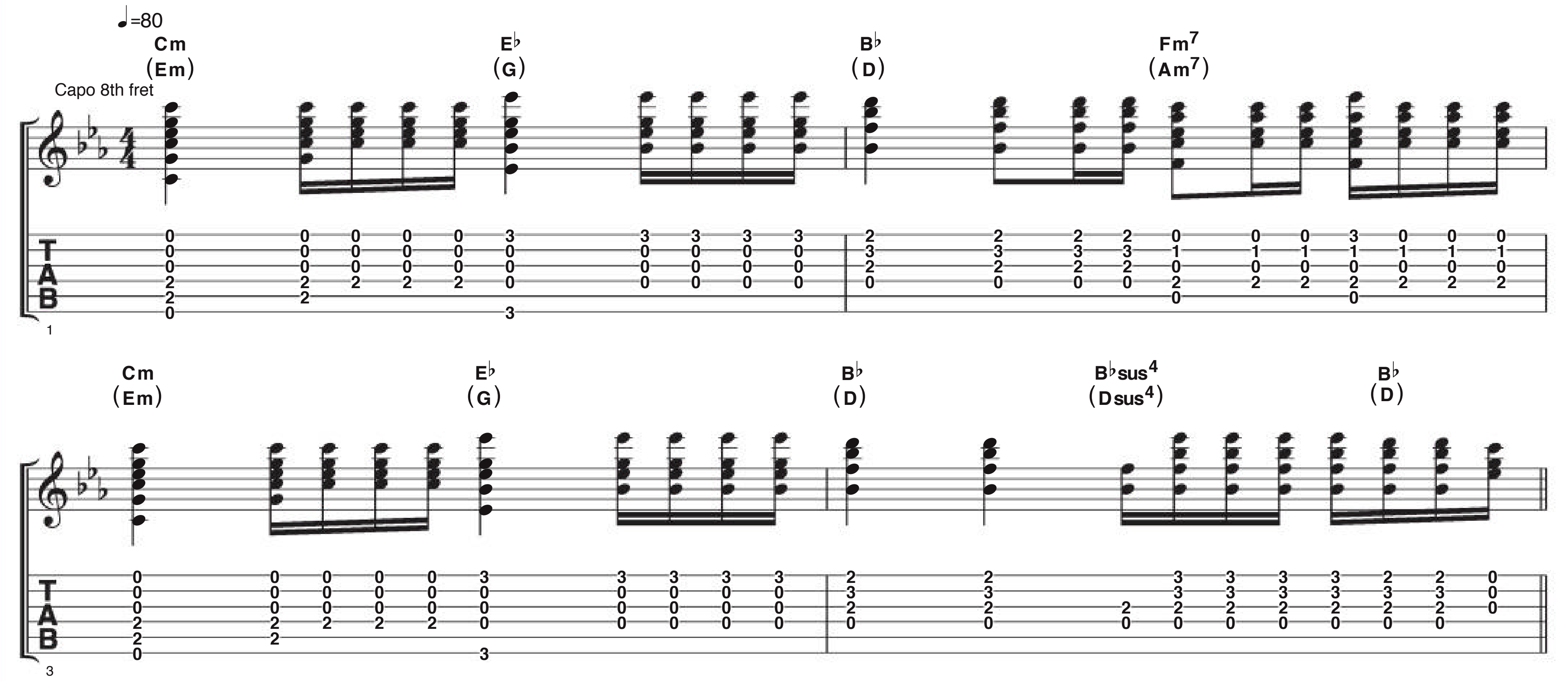
## Verse 3
A♭ E♭
How are your mum and dad?
B♭ E♭
How's your brother too?
A♭ E♭
My folks are holding up
B♭ Cm B♭
My sister's pulling through
A♭ E♭
And both the cats say hi
B♭ E♭ A♭
I know they miss you too

## Repeat chorus

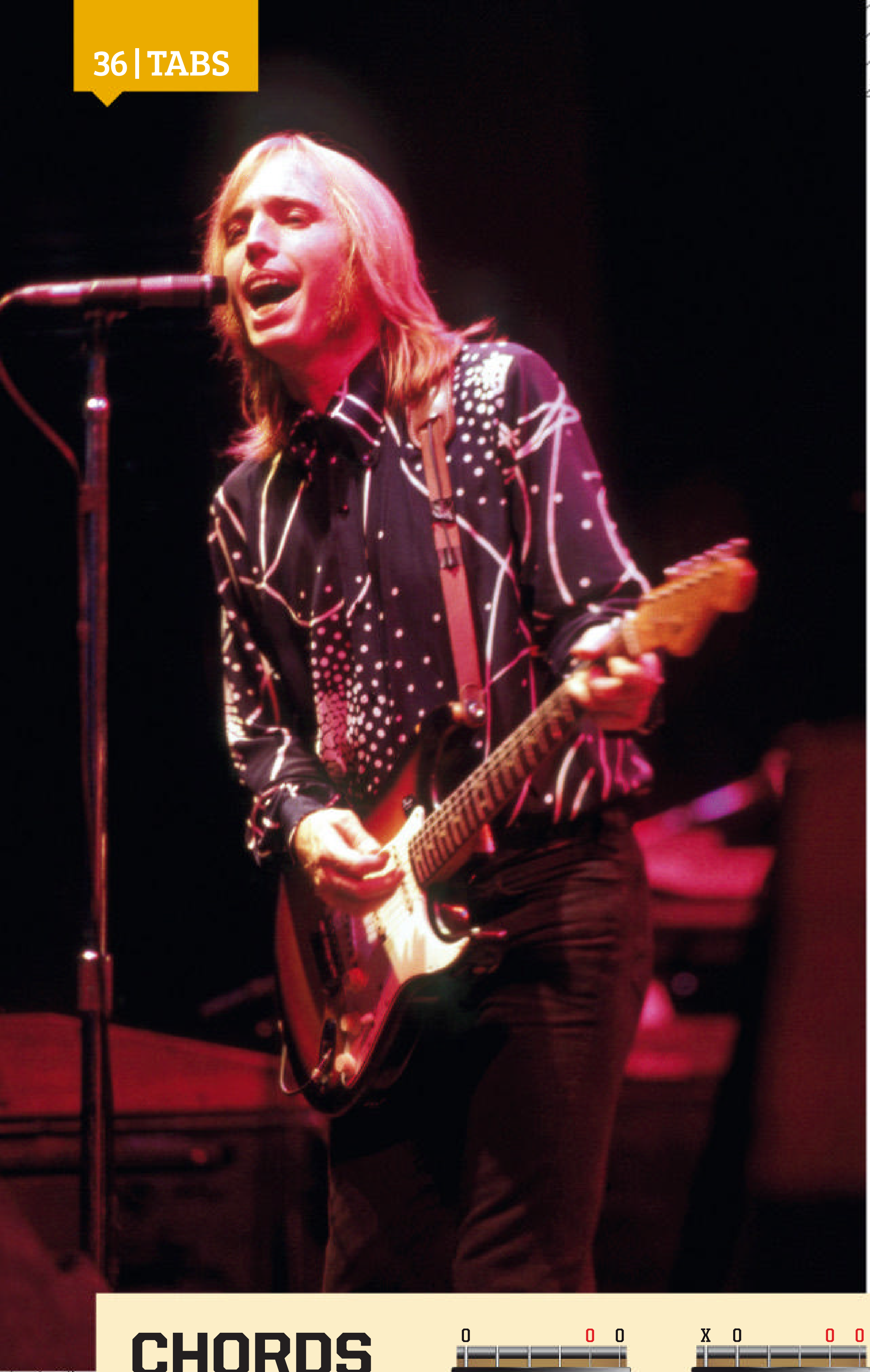
## Solo
Cm E♭ B♭ Fm7
Cm E♭ B♭ x2

## Repeat chorus

**PASSENGER** SWORD FROM THE STONE **Intro**




Keep your pick hand moving in constant 16th-note motion for these strummed chords in order to maintain rhythmic consistency and accuracy. Try bringing the thumb over the neck to help mute the idle open strings on the D shape chords.



LEARN TO PLAY

# TOM PETTY
## 'FREE FALLIN''

Discover how Tom Petty and Mike Campbell's easy shapes morph three sus chords into an anthemic riff.

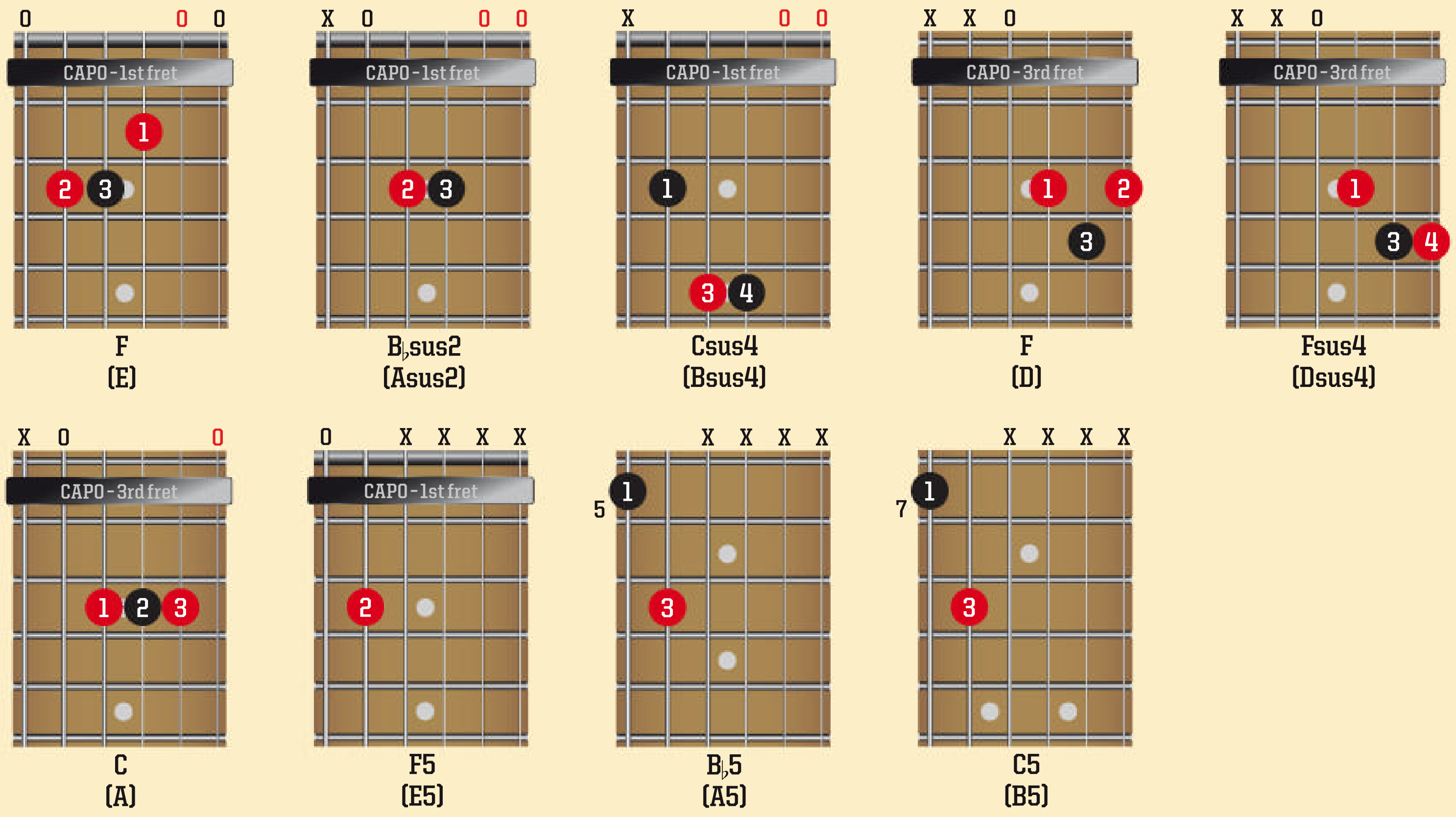
Not only is this one of Petty's finest offerings, but John Mayer also recorded a first-class live acoustic arrangement in 2008. With the two versions racking up almost 800 million Spotify streams between them, and with just a few easy chords to learn, we'd say the song is a fitting addition to every guitarist's songbook!

The simple but oh-so-hooky opening riff was played on Petty's 12-string acoustic and the 12-string electric of Mike Campbell (though it sounds great on a six-string, too). The acoustic part was played with a capo on the first fret and the electric guitar was capo'd in the third position. This unusual approach allowed both guitars to play contrasting open shapes for maximum resonance. The blending of these two parts created a riff that earned a place in rock 'n' roll history.

## CHORDS

There are nine shapes to learn if you want to deliver an authentic reproduction of Petty and Campbell's chords. Notice that they're all based around F, Bb and C root notes – so it's possible to busk your own arrangement around just three chords if you prefer to take a simpler approach. Listen out for the sound qualities of the sus chords. They're key to the song's uplifting feel.

If you're new to sus chords, some of the shapes here may look a little wrong! That's because these are regular major shapes with one note omitted (A to Asus2) or added (D to Dsus4). Don't worry about the theory behind these chords, it's the sound they create that's important. Add a few sus chords to your rhythm parts and you might just hit on that killer riff!




'FREE FALLIN''
Words and Music by Tom Petty and Jeff Lynne
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SONGSHEET

# Free Fallin'

## Intro
F B♭sus2 F Csus4 x2

## Verse 1
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
She's a good girl, loves her mama
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Loves Je - sus and America, too
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
She's a good girl, crazy 'bout Elvis
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Loves horses and her boyfriend too

## Interlude
F B♭sus2 F Csus4

## Verse 2
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
And it's a long day livin' in Reseda
F B♭sus2
There's a freeway
F Csus4
Runnin' through the yard
F B♭sus2
And I'm a bad boy
F Csus4
'Cause I don't even miss her
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
I'm a bad boy for breakin' her heart

## Chorus
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
And I'm free
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Free fallin'
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Yeah I'm free
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Free fallin'

## Verse 3
F B♭sus2
All the vampires
F Csus4
Walkin' through the valley
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Move west down Ventura Boulevard
F B♭sus2
And all the bad boys
F Csus4
Are standing in the shadows
F B♭sus2
And the good girls
F Csus4
Are home with broken hearts

## Repeat chorus

## Bridge
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
[no lyrics]
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Free fallin', now I'm, free fallin', now I'm
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
[no lyrics]
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Free fallin', now I'm, free fallin', now I'm

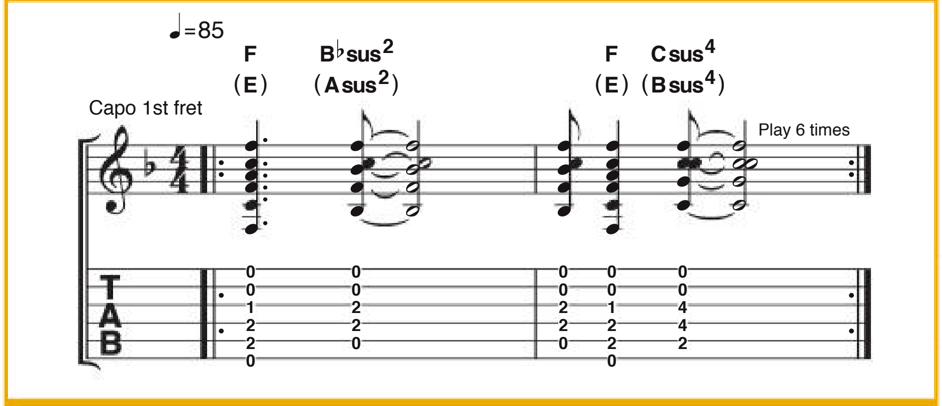
## Verse 4
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
I wanna glide down over Mulholland
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
I wanna write her name in the sky
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
I'm gonna free fall out into nothin'
F B♭sus2 F Csus4
Gonna leave this world for a while

## Repeat chorus

## Breakdown
F5 B♭5 F5 C5 x2

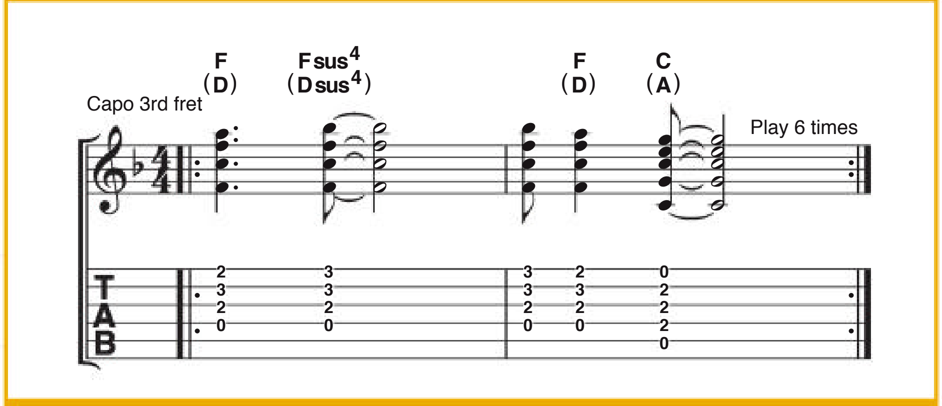
## Repeat chorus to fade

**TOM PETTY** FREE FALLIN' Intro/Verses (acoustic)



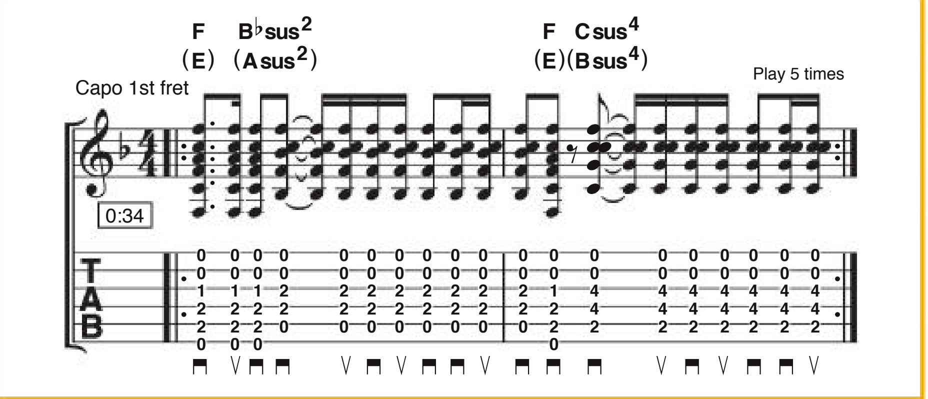

Fret right on your fingertips to make sure you're not accidentally muting the open second string when you're fretting the B♭sus2 and Csus4 shapes here.

**TOM PETTY** FREE FALLIN' Intro/Verses (electric)



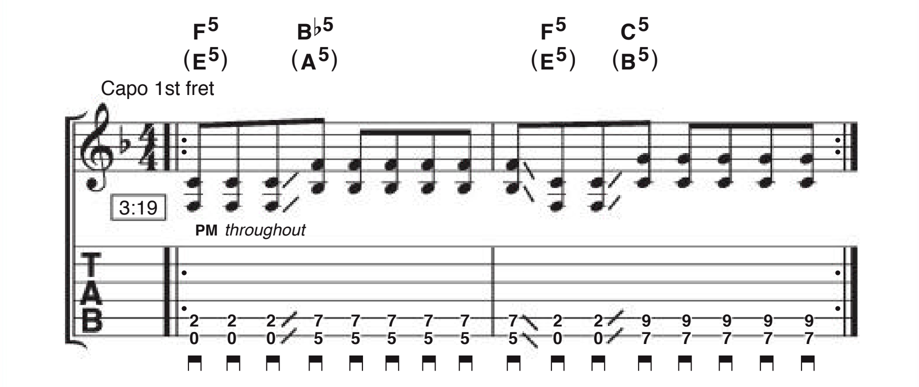

This part repeats throughout the track with just the odd variation or two. The chord shapes are different to the acoustic guitar thanks to a 3rd position capo.

**TOM PETTY** FREE FALLIN' Interlude / verse 2 (acoustic)




The strumming is busier but steady here. Keep your motion even and apply only light accentuation to the chord changes.

**TOM PETTY** FREE FALLIN' Breakdown




There's more of a straight-ahead rock feel here with these powerchords. Slide along the strings on the changes but make sure to strum every chord.

LEARN TO PLAY

# TASH SULTANA

## 'JUNGLE'

Get your groove on with this looper pedal epic, complete with rhythm parts, harmony guitar riffs and two killer solos!

Using loop pedals, delay, drum machines and the odd synth, Tash Sultana creates fascinating soundscapes of dense guitar work, mixing styles and genres with a refreshing disregard for commercialism or fashion. 'Jungle' was the third single to be released from their debut EP *Notion*, and Sultana recently spoke to *Total Guitar* about the songwriting process.

"It's just a little four-chord song – sometimes that's all you need," they said. I had these four chords and a Loop Station, and I just jammed it. I started doing all these little diddles over the top of it, and they turned into a melody line. I put my phone on record and just started filming it. It's funny that sometimes these things that you give no thought to end up being the biggest things that happen to you."

"I recorded the original demo with my old Epiphone Les Paul. It was just a Boss RC-30 Loop Station, a little analogue delay pedal, and a little distortion pedal for the solo. I still use the distortion to this day, but I can't say what it is. I don't want people to know! I used to cover my guitar pedals so that people couldn't copy them."

"I didn't use an amp. The YouTube video was not even into a mixing desk. I literally just slammed into the back of the speaker. I use amps at home just to have a fiddle on. But for my actual rehearsal and touring, everything is digital and DI'ed."

## CHORDS

The good news: you only need to know four chords to play this song. The bad news: they're all tough six-string barre chords!

'JUNGLE'
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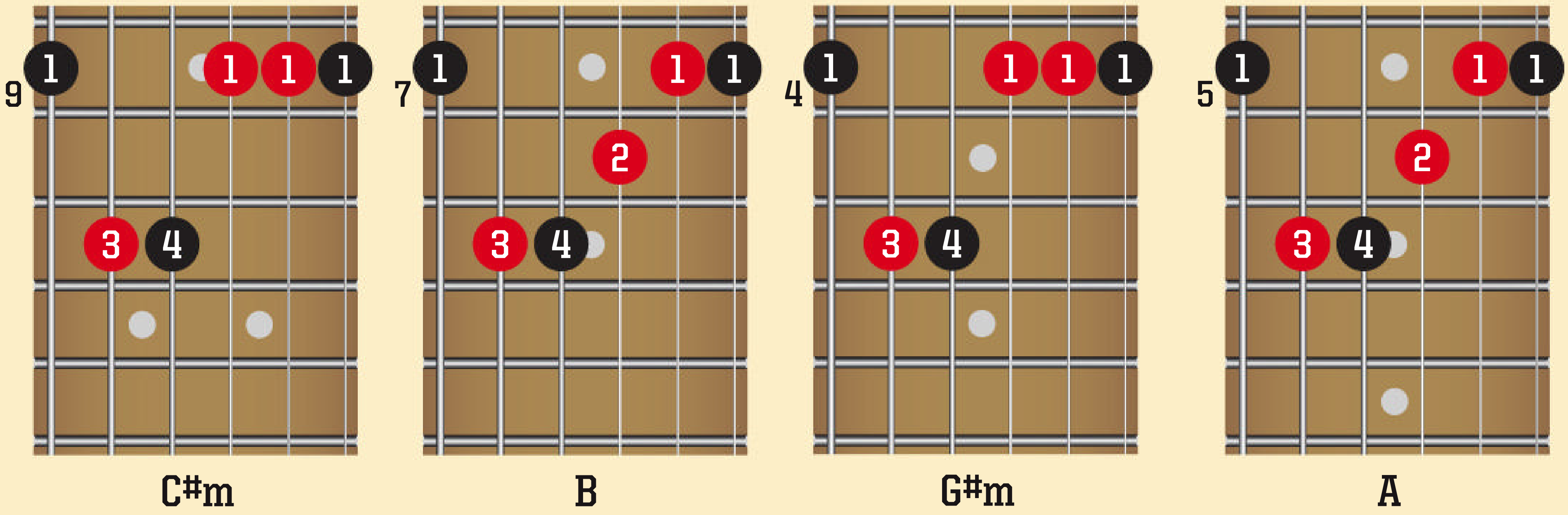


SONGSHEET

# Jungle

## Verse 1

C♯m B
I see the way you move. It's fluid
G♯m A
With you by my side, got nothing to hide
C♯m
Now that you're hurting
B
I see the tears behind those eyes
G♯m
And I can't wipe them clear
A
Your love was like gold to me
C♯m B
But you hold me closer to the light
G♯m
Wouldn't find the bullet inside
A
Unless you magnified
C♯m
But you throw me into the deep end
B
Expect me to know how to swim
G♯m
And I put my faith inside of my hands
A
Because I will be just fine

## Chorus

C♯m
Welcome to the jungle
B
Are you gonna dance with me?
G♯m
Welcome to the jungle
A
You got to close your eyes and see
C♯m
Welcome to the jungle
B
Are you gonna dance with me?
G♯m A
Well, nah, well, no nah, ooh ooh

## Verse 2

C♯m
Sitting tight with my black jeans on

And I'm paralysed

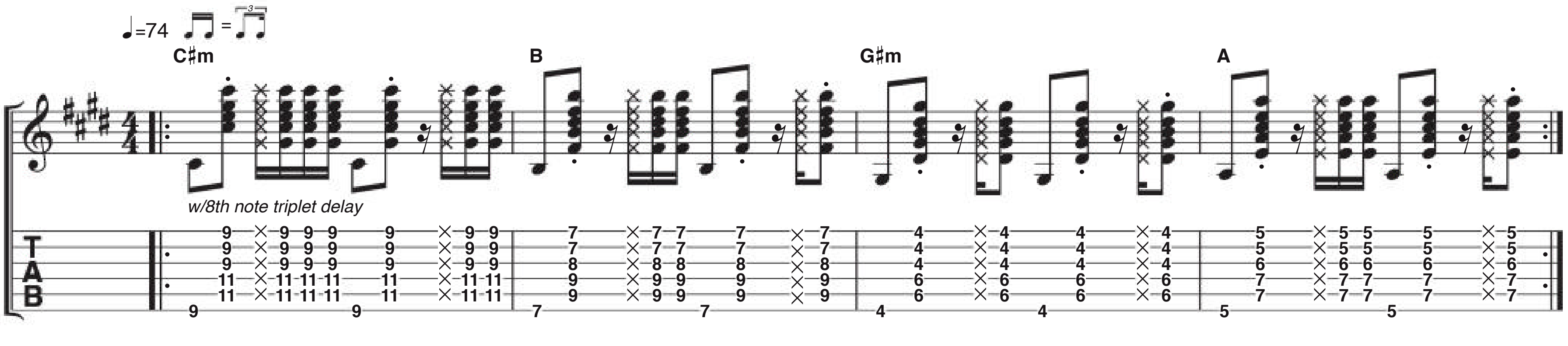
Make your way toward the sun
B
Got the palest soul you ever seen oh darling

You mightn't be the one
G♯m
Sitting tight with my curly hair

Making your way with that sheepish stare
A
Said are you real, do you feel, are you there?
C♯m B
Ashes to ashes in the embers I, I blaze, oh
G♯m
I gotta rise amongst it all and I think
A
About your face everyday
C♯m B
But you hold me closer to the li - i - ight
G♯m
You wouldn't find the bullet so insi - ide
A
Only if you magnified

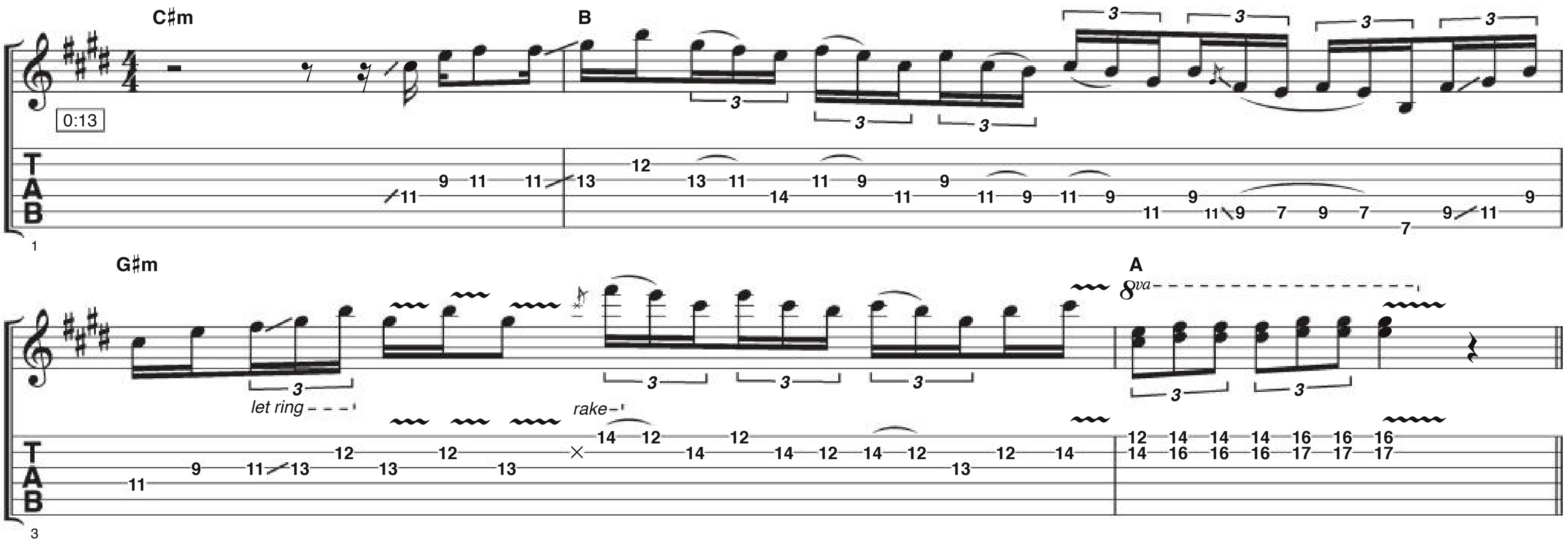
## Repeat Chorus

**TASH SULTANA** JUNGLE Intro (rhythm guitar)



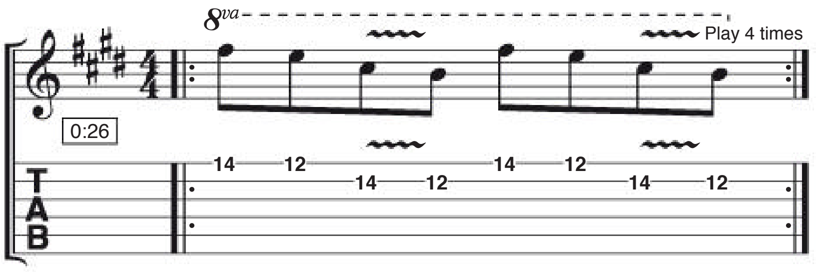

Try to feel the 'bounce' in every strum you play here. Achieve this by using alternate 16th-note strumming and making your downstrokes longer than your upstrokes.

**TASH SULTANA** JUNGLE Intro (solo)



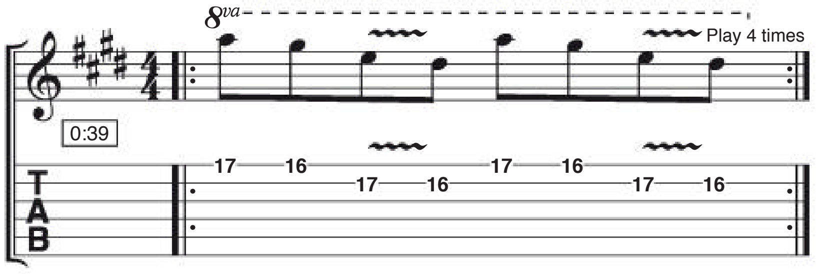

Fret the doublestops in bar 4 with your first and third fingers, before switching to your second finger for the 17th fret E note.

## TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Harmony guitar



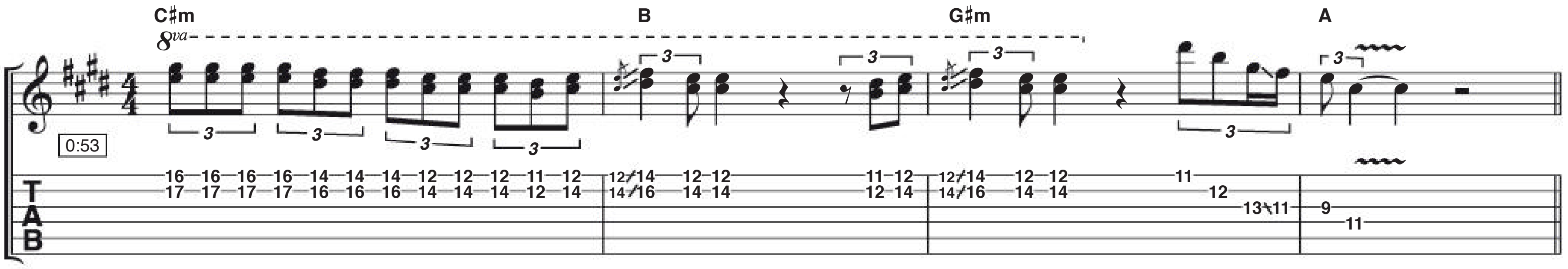

Notice the vibrato on beats 2 and 4. Aim for consistent timing, as you need to match it when you overdub the second part.

## TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Harmony guitar 2



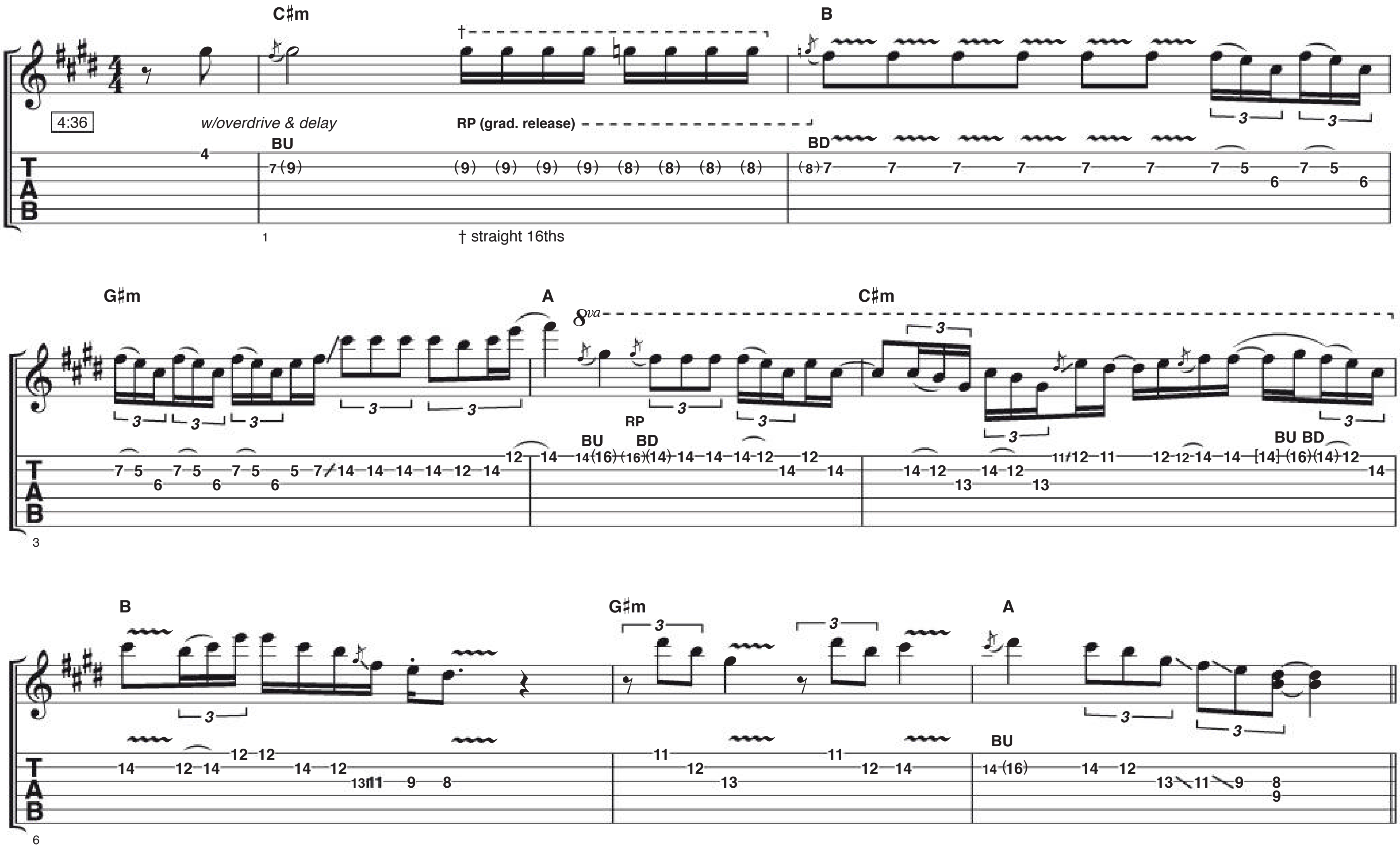

Use the same vibrato width and speed here as harmony guitar 1. This is crucial to achieving slick and polished results.

## TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Recurring lick




As with the intro solo, switch between your first and second, then your first and third fingers for the two-note shapes.

## TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Outro (solo)




There is a lot of complex rhythm here, but a lot of the phrases such as the triplets in bars 2 and 3 can be picked up by ear. Just listen carefully!

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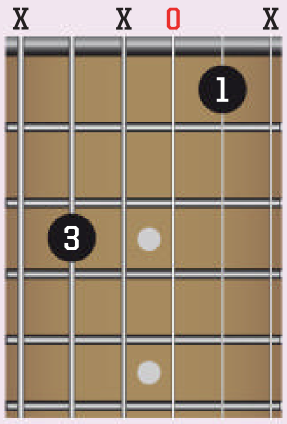
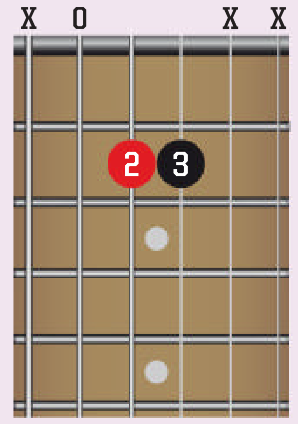
## FRET BOXES

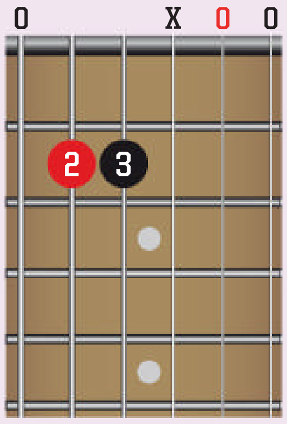
Notice that these shapes are almost identical to standard open C, A, G, E and D shapes. And remember all the hard work you put into avoiding accidentally muting strings with the undersides of your fingers? Well, now you can relax a bit, as for chords like C5 and A5 you'll deliberately let your fingers choke the high E string. For G5, the underside of your second finger should mute the fifth string en route to fretting the low E.



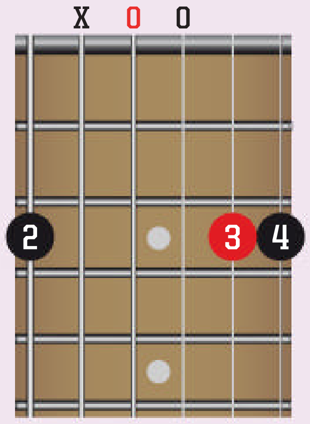

C5



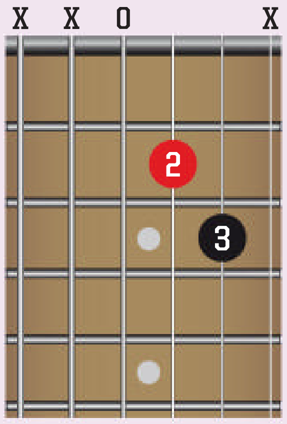

A5




E5




G5




D5

# OPEN POWERCHORDS

MAKE EASY CHANGES TO FIVE CHORDS YOU ALREADY KNOW TO MASTER RIFF ROCK AND CLASSIC METAL.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **JONNY SCARAMANGA**.

By now, if you're reading this, you're probably confident with classic two-note fretted powerchord shapes. There's another way to play powerchords, though. Most associated with AC/DC, open powerchords sound bigger and looser than fretted ones. They're perfect for hard rock and classic metal, and essential for playing like Van Halen, Ozzy, Maiden, and any of the bands they influenced.

Mastering these powerchords shouldn't take too much work either, because they're based on shapes you probably already know. Open powerchords take the five basic open major chords (that's C, A, G, E, and D) and remove the major 3rd.

To play them, first identify the note(s) you need to remove (we've done that for you with our fret boxes). Then form the chord shape as normal. For any notes you don't want to hear, rest a fretting finger gently on the string to mute it. Read on as we help you get started with the all important new shapes, plus we've written two tab examples for you to jam along to.

# TECHNIQUE CHECK...

Get your fingers in the right place and your powerchords will rock!

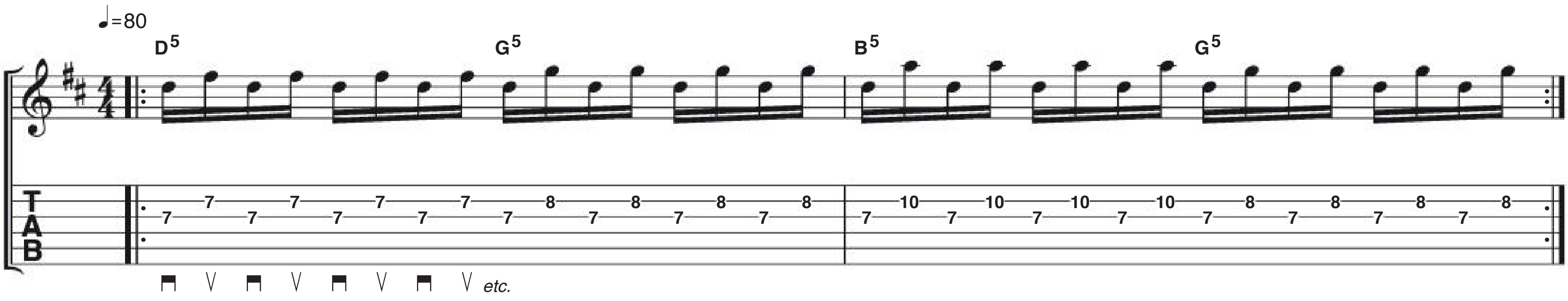
**1. STRING MUTING**
The way to mute unwanted notes is to touch your finger against the string, but not press hard enough to fret the note.

**2. A5 TO G**
Try playing A5 by barring with your first finger, angled so the first and second strings are muted. Your second finger is free to fret the sixth string.

**3. C5**
For C5, mute the bass string by stubbing up against it with the tip of your third finger.

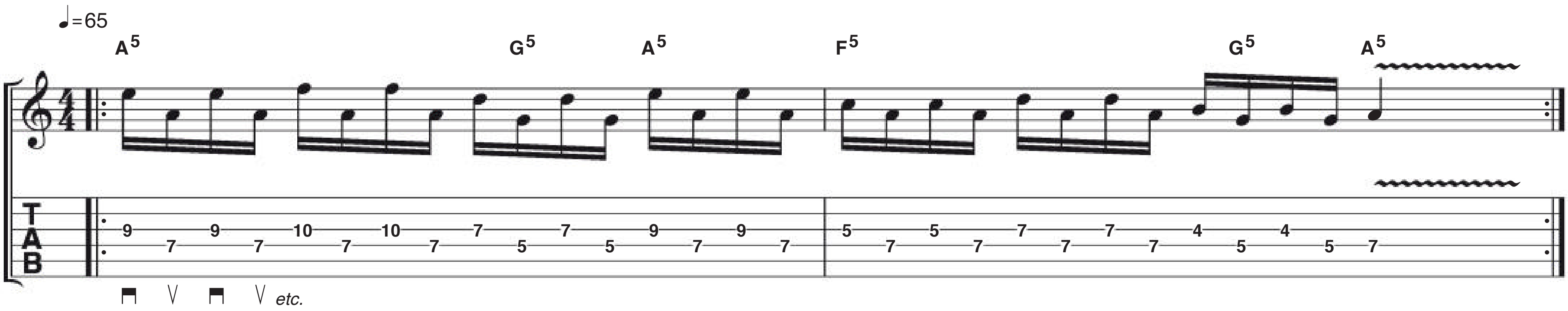
**4. D5**
For D5 and A5 powerchords, bring your thumb over the neck to mute the low E string.

## 1 OPEN POWERCHORDS




Bar #3 is a common AC/DC and Van Halen move. See picture #2 above for how to do it. For G5, the underside of your second finger should mute the A string.

## 2 GALLOP RIFF



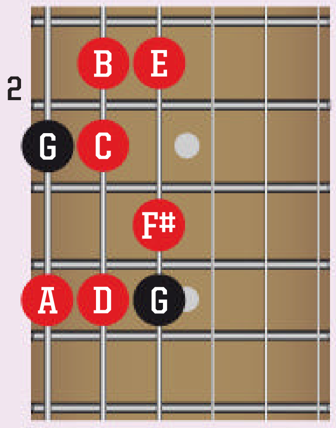

Get the chord stabs right first, then add the gallops on the sixth string. Pick all gallops down-down-up so that you land on a downstroke on each chord.

## WRIST, FOREARM OR ELBOW?

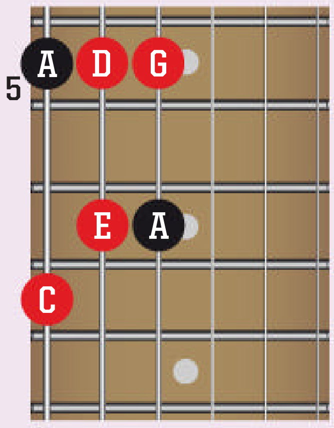
Which body parts should you move for your picking motion? You can find amazing guitarists who pick primarily with their wrist (Yngwie Malmsteen), forearm rotation (Paul Gilbert), and elbow (Michael Angelo Batio) – though, like we say, alternate picking isn't exclusive to virtuoso shred. Regardless of the music you're into, try to be mindful that you're not tensing up, as this can lead to pain and injury. As long as you feel relaxed and sound good, any of these motions (or a combination of them) are valid.

## PICKING SCALES

Double-pick scale notes to improve your technique. Usually with scales you'll play each note once, then move on to the next one. A great way to hone your picking skills is to pick each note two or four times instead. For example, in G major you'd play G G, A A, B B, and so on.




G major scale




A minor pentatonic scale

# ALTERNATE PICKING

IMPROVE YOUR LEAD GUITAR SKILLS WITH A TECHNIQUE THAT'S USED BY INDIE KIDS, SHREDDERS AND BLUES HOUNDS ALIKE.

WORDS AND LESSON BY **JONNY SCARAMANGA**.

New guitarists tend to pick every note in the same direction. Most favour downstrokes, though a few gravitate to upstrokes. Still, seeing as your pick has to travel in the opposite direction to get back to where it started, you may as well pluck another note on the way. That way you can play twice as many notes with the same amount of movement. Known as alternate picking, this technique is how shredders and bluegrass flat-pickers get their speed – but it's a core part of soloing, whatever style you play.

We recommend getting started by repeatedly picking one single note. Aim for a motion that feels comfortable, sounds good, and where every note is roughly the same volume. With these basics covered, read on and we'll help you take your playing to the next level with a handy scale exercise, some technique tips and a pair of inspiring musical ideas for you to try out.

# TECHNIQUE CHECK...

Get your pick in prime position to make those licks easier

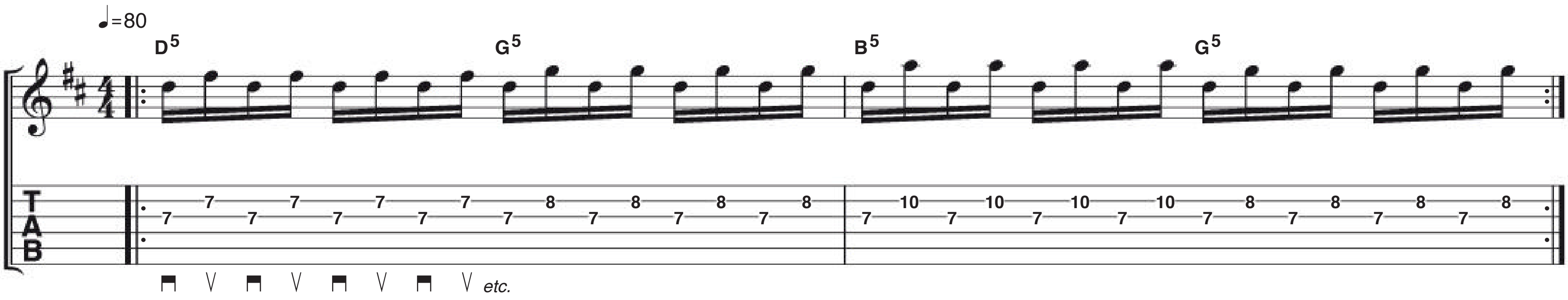
**1. TRIGGER GRIP**
Finding a comfortable grip is essential. For a 'trigger' grip, place the pick on the side of your index finger. Drop your thumb on top to hold it in place.

**2. PAD GRIP**
A variation on the trigger grip, here the pick is pinched between the pads of thumb and forefinger.

**3. PAD-SIDE GRIP**
Kind of halfway between pad and trigger, the pick is on an angle. Use whichever of these methods feels most comfortable and in control.

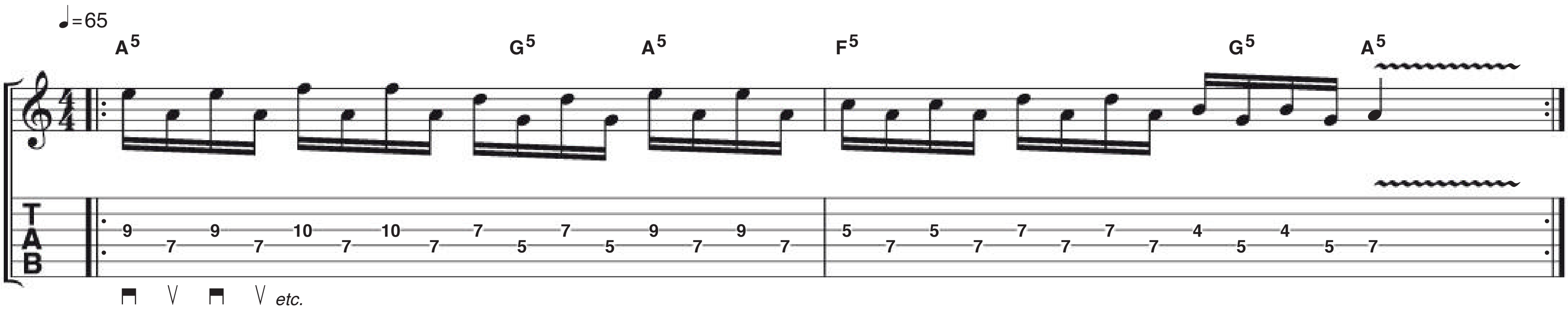
**4. THREE-FINGER OR MIDDLE FINGER**
It's fine to use thumb and two fingers (like James Hetfield, shown here) or thumb and middle finger (like Eddie Van Halen).

## 1 OUTSIDE-STYLE ALTERNATE PICKING




This melodic rock lick will help you get used to swapping between strings using the 'outside' method (a downstroke on the lower-pitch string, then an upstroke on the higher one). It just means you're approaching each string from its 'outer' edge.

## 2 INSIDE-STYLE ALTERNATE PICKING




More melodic rock lead playing here in our 'inside' picking lick – so this time your pick approaches the strings from in between them. Make sure you are using strict down-up-down-up picking. It's a key part of the alternate picking technique.

# CONSOLIDATED 9THS

## HERE, WE CONTINUE OUR LOOK AT EXTENDED CHORDS BY FOCUSING IN ON THE DIFFERENT MUSICAL VARIETIES OF 7THS AND 9THS AND THEIR USAGE

WORDS AND LESSON BY **RICHARD BARRETT**.

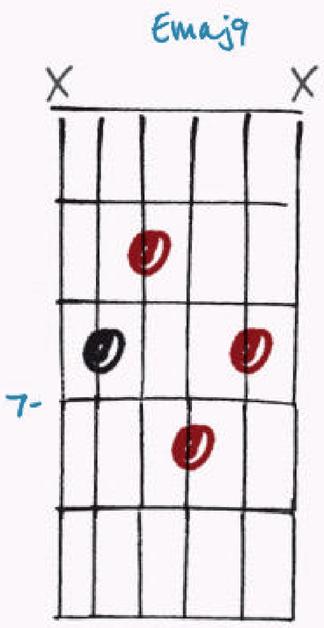
Just in case you were wondering, 'consolidated' is not a theoretical term – though I thought it might be a good idea to bring a few different 9ths together in one place, highlighting their differences and similarities both in music theory and on the fretboard. This can help when dealing with all manner of extended chords and harmony in a variety of genres.

I'm dealing with a couple of different sub-categories here. Major or minor is something I'll assume we're all familiar with. However, major or minor 7ths are also very significant once we start extending chords.

With no disrespect intended to the 6th, 7ths really are the bedrock of extended chords. While the 9th, 11th and 13th add detail and melody, unless these are raised or lowered (known as 'altered'), it could be argued that the 7th/major 7th provides the essence of the harmony along with the major/minor 3rd. These examples walk through some possibilities step by step, with a hint of how voice-leading works as an added bonus.

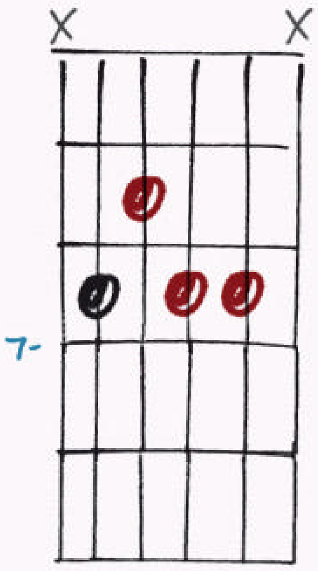
### EXAMPLE #1

In this Emaj9 chord, the 'maj' is referring to the 7th, not the chord itself, which is major unless specified otherwise – this saves having long, unwieldy chord names. We'll deal with adding the major 7th to a minor chord later. As with all of these examples, the highest note is F#, the 9th.



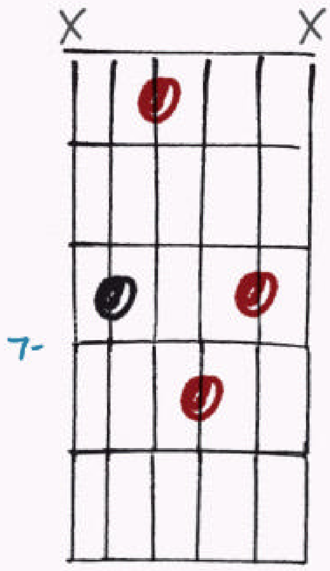

### EXAMPLE #2

Commonly called E9, this chord is built on the foundation of an E dominant 7th, which is another way of describing a b7th without getting into the potentially confusing territory of E(b7) versus Eb7… However, we always name chords such as this from their highest extension, so this is where the 9th comes in. It's very different from an add9, which does not contain any kind of 7th!



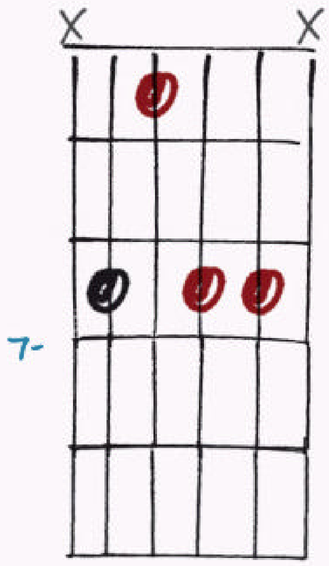

### EXAMPLE #3

As promised, here is what happens when you add a major 7th to a minor chord. This Em/maj9 would be an Em/maj7 if we took the F#/9th away. This is unusually detailed for a chord name because slang terms can develop over time, such as 'the Hendrix chord'. I predict that future generations will refer to this example as 'the Bond chord'!



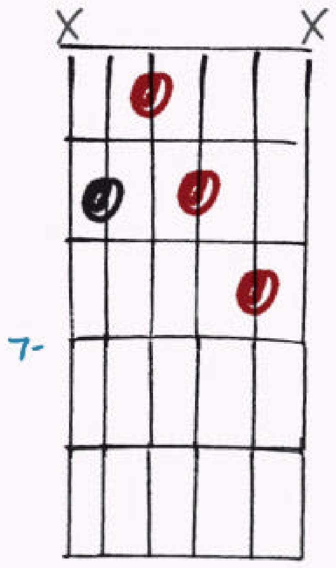

### EXAMPLE #4

Flatten the major 7th of Em/maj9 to a dominant 7th and you get Em9. Remove the F# and this gives you Em7 – less harmonically detailed but basically interchangeable with its jazzier counterpart, as I was explaining earlier. Still, it's interesting how fundamentally we can change the chord elsewhere by simply raising or lowering a semitone…




### EXAMPLE #5

Stepping slightly outside my original premise, this Eb7#9 moves everything but the top note. In the context of the Eb7 triad on the A, D and G strings, F# is now a #9th (not a 9th). This is a nice opportunity to show how moving shapes like this step by step can give an effect similar to the classical device of voice-leading. Also, try 'resolving' to a Dmaj9 using the shape from Example #1.



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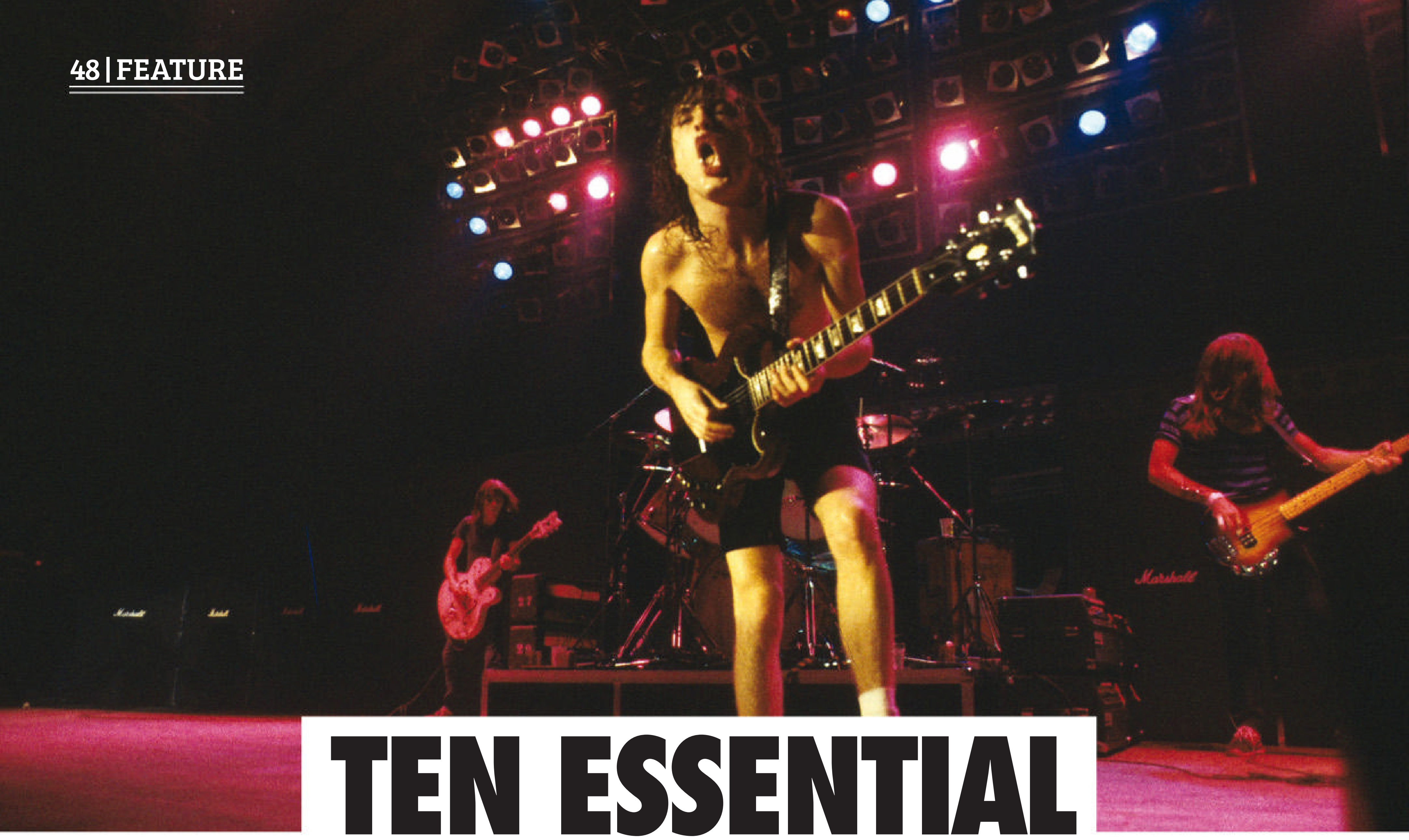



# TEN ESSENTIAL GIBSON SG ALBUMS

THE SOLIDBODY DOUBLE-CUT WITH THE INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE SILHOUETTE HAS GRACED SOME OF THE GREATEST RECORDINGS OF ALL TIME.

WORDS BY **GLENN KIMPTON**.

Along with its cousin, the Les Paul – as well as Fender's Stratocaster and Telecaster – the Gibson SG arguably rounds out the big four of classic electric guitars. It's lent power, brawn and sonic versatility to countless vital long-players in the six decades since its introduction.

Narrowing things down to just the ten best of these innumerable SG-powered albums is a near-impossible task, but it does help chart rock's dizzying evolution, particularly in the '60s and '70s. From AC/DC's rabble-rousing debut to Sister Rosetta Tharpe's stunning *Live In Paris 1964*, the following albums all – with an SG leading the charge – made a tremendous impact on music in their own way.

## WHY LES PAUL DIDN'T LIKE THE GIBSON SG

It's a well-known piece of guitar history that, after the Les Paul electric guitar emerged as a powerhouse in modern music in the late 1950s, the first-ever SG models soon followed suit, and were initially released by Gibson in 1961 with the Les Paul name attached. However, much to his relief, Paul's name was promptly removed from the headstocks of the new instruments – after his endorsement contract expired in 1962 – with his own animosity for the two-horned, radical-looking axe becoming a well-known piece of Gibson lore.

Though many have since speculated that such disapproval resulted from a dislike for the aesthetics, Paul's longtime guitar tech Tom Doyle recently sat down with *Guitarist* magazine to shed some light on the story and discuss the real reasons behind Les's ultimate aversion for the SG. And, according to Doyle, said reasons are far more concerned with the functionality, usability and tonal performance of the guitar, rather than the appearance. Unsurprising, really, given Paul's penchant for design.

"He didn't like it in the sense that the neck was very movable when you played," revealed Doyle. "He had a lot of strength in his hands. And with an SG you can actually create vibrato with the neck moving back and forth, with the original neck tenon they had on it.

That's not to say there weren't aspects of the SG that won Paul over, despite his lack of enthusiasm for the neck movement. In fact, the double-cutaway design was actually something that impressed him.

"He loved the fact it had a very fast neck, no question about it," he continued. "He could reach even further up the neck than on a regular Les Paul, too. You just couldn't get the same kind of sound, resonance-wise because it was not the thickness of a Les Paul body and also it didn't have a maple cap on it like his Goldtop. But, at first, he thought, 'Well, we've got to go with it because these changes are for reasons of economics and because people want a lighter guitar.'"

Of course, Les Paul himself has spoken about the reasons behind his initial dislike for the SG before, during an appearance on the 2016 guitar documentary *Turn It Up!* Paul said,"The problem that the SG had was the fact that you could pull back on the neck, and it wasn't strong enough. I don't want no vibrato by bending on the neck. I want a good solid instrument, and it didn't sustain as good. Otherwise, it's a good instrument."

***Words by Matt Owen***

## AC/DC – *HIGH VOLTAGE* (1976)

AC/DC's first proper release also featured Angus Young's first SG, a 1970 model ('probably', says Angus himself) bought that same year. It was used exclusively throughout most of the 70s – and even on 2020's *Power Up*. *High Voltage* was famously slammed by *Rolling Stone* magazine, but it's hard to argue with its energy and the quality of material and performances.

**» Key track: 'T.N.T.'**

## CREAM – *DISRAELI GEARS* (1967)

Fair enough, Cream's second effort isn't considered the most consistent record, but when it got it right it absolutely shone – and Clapton's spellbinding playing on his 1964 'Fool' Gibson SG is all over it. Plus it also goes down in history for introducing Clapton's coveted 'woman' tone; just check out the opening riff to 'Sunshine Of Your Love'.

**» Key track: 'Sunshine Of Your Love'**

## BLACK SABBATH – *PARANOID* (1970)

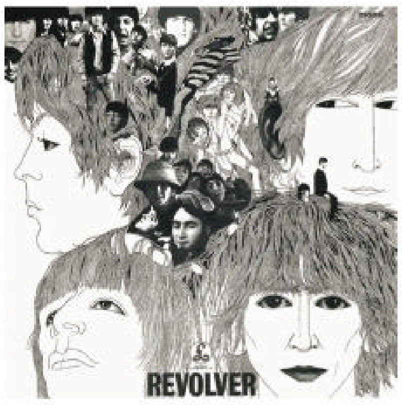
Left-handed riff king Tony Iommi is responsible for many teens purchasing SGs (and rupturing their own eardrums). His band's second album continued the band's eponymous debut's theme of a dark and heavy low sound, and is considered a benchmark in heavy metal music. The title track is key, but War Pigs is a standout, too.

**» Key track: 'War Pigs'**

## THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND – *HITTIN' THE NOTE* (2003)

Duane Allman is a crucial player in the SG canon, as is Derek Trucks, whose clear and precise blues sound is revered the world over. *Hittin' The Note* is especially notable here since it's the final Allman Brothers Band album and the only one to feature Trucks. His mellow juicy lines work well with Warren Haynes' guitar work on an enjoyable and solid record.

**» Key track: 'Instrumental Illness'**




## THE BEATLES – *REVOLVER* (1966)

The hints of experimentalism heard on the previous year's *Rubber Soul* went on to be further realised on 1966's *Revolver*. For the studio sessions, George Harrison relied heavily on his 1964 Gibson SG Standard, which he later gave to Pete Ham of Badfinger. The tone achieved on the track 'She Said She Said' is just stunning.

**» Key track: 'She Said She Said'**

## THE DOORS – *L.A. WOMAN* (1971)

The last studio album to feature Jim Morrison at the helm, the Doors' sixth studio release was also a return to a stripped-back, more bluesy sound for the California band – and what a resounding success it was too. Robby Krieger's 1968 SG Standard features throughout, but really starts hitting its stride when the cracking 'Been Down So Long' kicks in.

**» Key track: 'Been Down So Long'**

## FRANK ZAPPA & THE MONSTERS – *ROXY & ELSEWHERE* (1974)

Zappa's 'Baby Snakes' SG of the late '70s was actually an obscure custom copy, but the 'Roxy' model he used for this album was a Gibson, albeit modified with various switches and preamps. His son Dweezil has since stated that Frank's tone is impossible to emulate; and even the briefest of listens to this rollercoaster album will back that claim.

**» Key track: 'Cheepnis'**

## HAIM – *DAYS ARE GONE* (2013)

Danielle Haim has become a modern icon for the SG, and this tightly performed, highly listenable, well-produced debut album from her band is chock-full of spiky, accomplished pop songs, with her jagged picking on a 2005 Cherry Red Standard a key element. Check out live footage of the band for the full experience.

**» Key track: 'Falling'**

## THE WHO – *LIVE AT LEEDS* (1970)

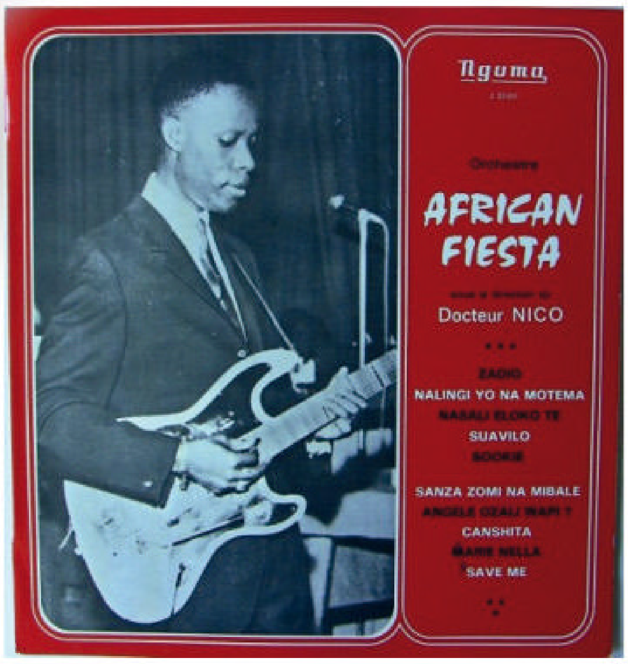
*Live At Leeds* is well up there with the best-ever live rock albums, and it's also a cracking example of the power of the SG. Just hear Pete Townshend's fretboard surfing during 'My Generation' for unquestionable proof of its muscle. And talking of strength, the modified SG in question is also famous for surviving being smashed to smithereens on stage.

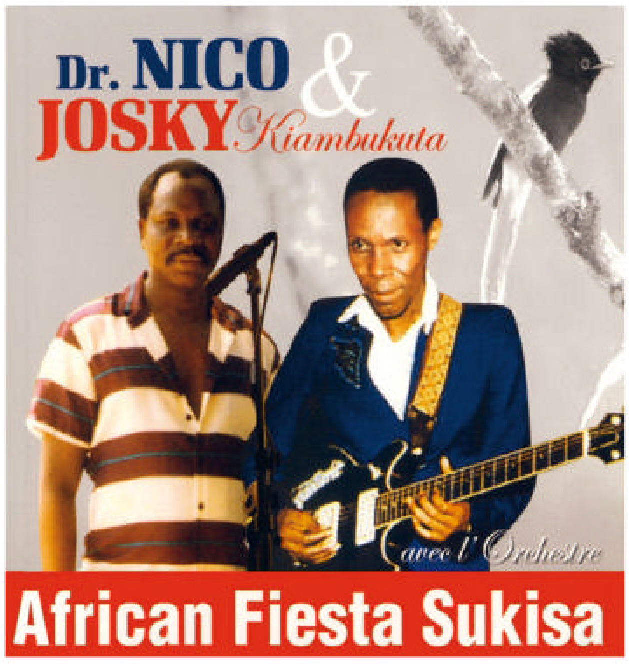
**» Key track: 'My Generation'**

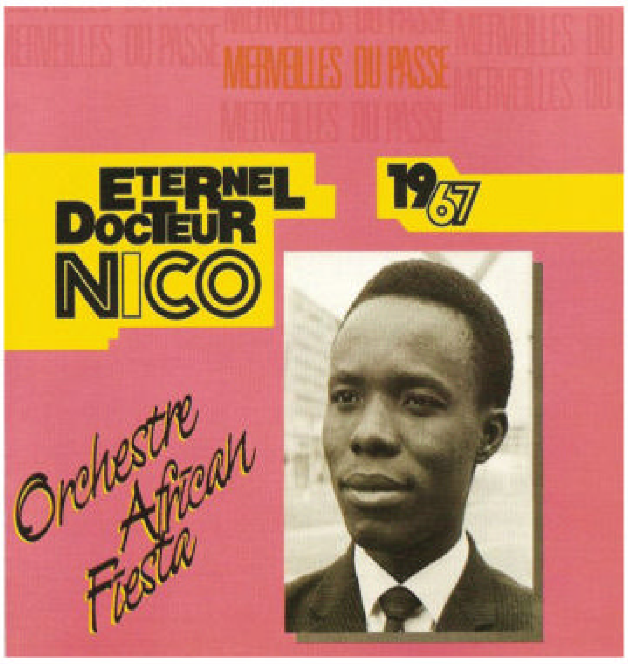
## SISTER ROSETTA THARPE – *LIVE IN PARIS 1964* (1988)

This remarkable guitarist has been cited as a key influence for many a star player over the years, including Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix. Later in her career, the good sister acquired her classic white early '60s SG model, which bore the 'Les Paul Custom' nameplate (which subsequently disappeared at the end of '63) and was showcased well in this live set.

**» Key track: 'This Train'**




# AFRICA'S GUITAR GOD

AROUND THE SAME TIME ALL THAT "CLAPTON IS GOD" GRAFFITI WAS TURNING UP ON LONDON WALLS, AFRICANS WERE CALLING **DR. NICO** THE GUITAR GOD.

WORDS BY **ALAN DI PERNA** (WITH ASSISTANCE FROM **MICHAEL NEWTON**).

When Jimi Hendrix passed through Paris on one of his tours, a guitarist he was keen to meet was Nicolas Kasanda wa Mikalay – the Congolese finger-picking electric guitar master more widely known as Dr. Nico, or to many across mid-20th century Africa, L' Eternel Docteur Nico. At around the same time that "Clapton is God" graffiti was appearing on London walls, Africans were calling Dr. Nico the Guitar God. With good reason.

If cascades of gorgeous-to-gritty tone, an effortless flow of sparkling, playful melody, harmonisation and dazzling polyrhythmic syncopations make up your idea of six-string divinity, Dr. Nico surely belongs in your pantheon. He came along at an ideal moment in musical history and African history. In the late 1950s and early '60s, the electric guitar had reached a golden age in its evolution as a musical instrument. As a result, the world went mad for electric guitars. In Africa, Dr.

Nico was one of the key players who established a prominent place for the electric guitar in the popular music of the continent. In 1960, his native country – what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo – won its freedom from Belgian colonial rule. The people were ready to celebrate their liberation.

Dr. Nico helped forge the soundtrack for that party, initially as a guitarist for Le Grand Kalle et l'African Jazz, called the first great Congolese band. He was only 14 when he first joined Kalle in 1953, and played lead guitar on the group's iconic 1960 single, 'Independence Cha Cha'. Often credited as the first pan-African hit record, the song helped popularise Congolese rumba – a style of dance music adapted from Cuban son and other Latin musical idioms.

One thing that distinguished Congolese rumba from its Latin-Caribbean counterparts is that electric guitars took on some of the musical roles played by horns, woodwinds, pianos and other instruments in Cuban music. You can draw a parallel to Charlie Christian's work with Benny Goodman in the late '30s and early '40s – using the then-new tonalities of the electric guitar to play solos and other parts more traditionally played by saxes, trumpets and the like. What Charlie Christian is to American jazz guitar, Dr. Nico is to Africa's vibrant guitar legacy – an originator and innovator.

He played a major role in the creation of the unique, three-guitar style heard in Congolese rumba and subsequent genres such as soukous. Whereas rock, country and other American styles typically have two guitars – lead and rhythm – African dance music also adds a third guitar, playing what's known as mi-solo, or "half solo". While the rhythm guitar takes care of chording and comping, the mi-solo guitar often plays syncopated ostinatos known as guajeos, which are based around the song's harmonic progression. Guajeos are heard throughout Latin and Afro-Caribbean popular music. In salsa, to cite a familiar example, guajeos are typically played in octaves by a pianist. But in Congolese pop, the role often falls to the electric mi-solo guitar.

Which leaves the lead guitar free to dance atop the swirling rhythmic maze created by the two other guitars, along with percussion, horns and other instruments. And this top line is where Dr. Nico's mastery shines through. The fecundity of his melodic imagination seems limitless at times – non-stop flurries of fluid arpeggios, double-stop harmonisations, rhythmic punctuations accentuating the plaintive, three-part male vocal harmonies of Congolese rumba, and taking center stage when the time for a solo rolls around. Which is a frequent occurrence in this style of music. As with all dance music, it's about generating and maintaining momentum – building up, breaking down, drawing dancers and listeners deeper and deeper into the groove.

Actually, Dr. Nico is one of two great Congolese guitar originators. The other is Franco Luambo Makiadi, leader of the group TPOK Jazz. Both were boldly innovative and much-imitated stylists – the Hendrix and Clapton of their time and place. But where Franco was a bit more geared toward using the electric guitar to emulate traditional African instruments, Dr. Nico dove head-first into the fuzzy, tremoloed-out, mid-century modernism of the electric guitar.

There's a well known photo of Dr. Nico stylishly dressed in a blue blazer and tie, white shirt and trousers, leaning on the front grille of bright red 1965 Plymouth Barracuda and holding a Egmond Typhoon electric guitar – a cheap Dutch import – in a matching shade of red. Other photos show him with a blond German archtop and a white Hofner solidbody. None of these are great guitars, obviously, but Dr. Nico embraced their lo-fi tonalities to create a wild and beguiling range of guitar timbres. He's known for introducing things like tremolo and reverb into African guitar music.

**"FOR AFRICAN MUSICIANS LIKE DR. NICO, THE EMBRACE OF LATIN RHYTHMS REPRESENTED A REPATRIATION OF SORTS. MANY OF THOSE RHYTHMS HAD ORIGINATED IN AFRICA, BROUGHT TO THE NEW WORLD BY THE SLAVE TRADE."**

There's a kind of grainy, rough-edged poetry to the sound – a throbbing, murky miasma – that both complements and contrasts with L'Eternel Docteur's supple execution. A good example would be a track like 'Toye na sango' by L'African Fiesta, a group he formed in 1963 after leaving Le Grand Kalle. With the gnarly harmonic overtones produced by cheap gear, Nico's guitar sometimes sounds like a steel drum or marimba. At the other end of the spectrum, he could bring the glistening glissandos of Hawaiian and country music to a ballad like 'Pauline', also by L'African Fiesta. He was truly international in scope.

Which was somewhat the point. Congolese rumba became the music of the rising middle class in the newly liberated African nation that had changed its name from the Belgian Congo to the Republic of Congo in 1960 – a country now taking its place on the international stage. The photo of Dr. Nico with the big American muscle car, snazzy suit and red guitar sums up the aspirational mood of that milieu. Incidentally, that the color scheme is red, white and blue.

In the middle years of the 20th century, Latin music and dance crazes had become popular worldwide. Artists like the Cuban pianist Perez Prado were topping the charts in America, the UK and elsewhere. Dr. Nico had visited Cuba in the '50s, absorbing the music firsthand.

For African musicians like Dr. Nico, the embrace of Latin rhythms represented a repatriation of sorts. Many of those rhythms had originated in Africa, brought to the New World by the slave trade. It couldn't have been more timely to bring them back home to a nation that had newly achieved independence from European colonial rule. But the mid-century African musicians put their own twist on Latin rhythms. There's a gentle rhythmic lilt to Congolese rumba that's unlike anything from the other side of the Atlantic. This was enhanced by poetic lyrics in French (the language of the Belgian colonisers) and Lingala, one of the region's indigenous languages. And of course, there are those guitars – an undulating rhythmic labyrinth that's easy to get lost in.

L'African Fiesta's lineup fluctuated. Nico's brother Mwamba Dechaud was sometimes his co-guitarist. And by 1965 the group had morphed into African Fiesta Sukisa. Dr. Nico was said to be "difficult" to get along with, and a poor businessman. He left the music industry in the mid '70s, following the collapse of his Belgian record label. He died in Belgium in 1985.

Just as he was leaving this earth, America was waking up to the splendor of African guitar music through the work of Nigerian band leader King Sunny Ade, who gained international exposure after signing with Island Records in 1982. Label chief Chris Blackwell was touting him as "the next Bob Marley". Paul Simon brought South African music to the worldwide mainstream with his multi-platinum Graceland album in 1986, which helped focus some much-deserved attention on South African guitarist Ray Phiri. With these inspirations, guitar players in America and Europe began exploring African music. Today you can find video tutorials for pieces like 'Independence Cha Cha' on YouTube. If you're a rock, blues, country, funk or folk guitarist in a rhythmic rut, Congolese rumba has the power to set you free.

In the '70s and '80s, the Congolese rumba music of Dr. Nico and his contemporaries became the basis for soukous, which would foster phenomenal guitarists like Diblo Dibala – known as "Machine Gun" for the rapid-fire accuracy of his playing. Soukous, in turn, spawned the stylish dance genres kwasa kwasa and zouk. Beyond this, rhythmically interlocking electric guitar patterns have become integral to so many musical styles all across Africa, from Tuareg bands and artists like Tinarawen and Mdou Moctar in the North to mbanqua groups like the Makgona Tsohle Band from South Africa.

In the vast continent of African electric guitar music, all roads ultimately lead back to Dr. Nico.

# FRESHLY SQUEEZED

A BRIEF OUTLINE ON ONE OF THE MOST UBIQUITOUS NAMES IN GUITAR MUSIC: **ORANGE AMPS**.

The roots of British amp giant Orange can be traced back to the West End of London where, in 1968, company founder Cliff Cooper opened up a small secondhand instrument store called the Orange Shop. Having painted the shopfront a dazzling psychedelic orange colour, Cooper's new enterprise certainly caught the eye of passing guitar shoppers as they perused the wares of Soho and Tin Pan Alley.

"Guys like Marc Bolan, Gary Moore and Paul Kossoff would sit in the shop chatting and jamming all day long," Cooper told us. "It was part of the whole thing that was happening. They'd come in, take a guitar off the wall and plug in."

One such patron of the Orange Shop was a young Peter Green whose stellar guitar playing in his band Fleetwood Mac had set the London blues scene alight – and Cooper went to see them play at every opportunity. With the band on the verge of international success, Cooper offered to supply them with a full backline of Orange amps for their upcoming American tour.

"Fleetwood Mac were really the first band to use Orange equipment," said Cooper. "We were lucky. When they took our gear to America, it launched us in the States, and not too long after that, Stevie Wonder also used the equipment to record Superstition. That launched us all over the world."

## LATE '60S

By the time Cooper had decided he wanted to build his own guitar amplifiers, he had already studied electronics at college. Working in collaboration with Mat Mathias of Radio Craft – a radio repair shop in West Yorkshire – the first Orange amps were assembled in Mathias' native Huddersfield and were also branded Matamp. Meanwhile, the first Orange speaker cabinets were constructed in the basement of Cooper's shop (where, in the early days, he would often sleep).

From November 1968, fewer than 50 100-watt OR100 Orange Matamp units were completed, making them highly sought-after collector's items. The very first amps were supplied to Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac for their US tour. The 200-watt OR200 appeared later in March 1969 and was powered by four 6550/KT88 valves (double the number onboard the original OR100). That spring, the second version of the OR100 appeared and it came fitted with four EL34s, while the new 50-watt OR50 was driven by two EL34s.

## PICS ONLY

Demand for Orange amps ramped up quickly and, in early 1970, production shifted to a larger facility in the Huddersfield area with subcontractors HH Electronics and Howells Radio helping with the workload. Within a year, however, manufacturing had relocated home to the West End. And there it stayed until 1973 when Orange escalated to assembly-line production at its new factory in Bexleyheath, Kent.

Designed in 1971, the EL34-powered 'Pics Only' GRO100 and GRO50 amps were launched in 1972. Boasting crunchy overdriven tones, they were the genesis of the 'Orange sound', becoming the benchmark for all future Orange amp designs. They had a different circuit than previously and they introduced Orange's unique six-position FAC midrange tone switch. Later named the OR100, OR80 and OR120, these 'Pics Only' amps were rejigged in 1973 to include text on the control panel. The later 'Pics & Text' amps launched in 1974, comprising the classic OR120 and OR80 models.

## AD SERIES

Manufacturing of the amplifiers at the Bexleyheath factory ended in 1979, though Cooper hung on throughout the next decade building and selling Orange amps – albeit in limited numbers.

In 1993, the Orange brand was licensed to Gibson who opted for the new amps to be made in England by Matamp. However, these '70s reissues were not a great success (though Noel Gallagher used an Overdrive 120 model for a time), and in 1997 Cooper regained control of the brand he started back in the late '60s. It was the dawn of a new era for Orange.

Beginning with the launch of the AD30 in 1998 (an amplifier that was famously played by Jimmy Page, Adrian Utley and PJ Harvey, to name just three), Orange went from strength to strength as the AD15 picked up the Editor's Pick Award in *Guitar Player*, when it was released the following year. This new phase for the company also saw Orange reconnecting with its Fleetwood Mac heritage when the AD15 combo became guitarist Jeremy Spencer's amp of choice.

## ROCKERVERB

Launched in 2003, the original Rockerverb was Orange's first high-gain amp design, making it a firm favourite in the metal world. Its versatile design also proved a winning formula for guitarists who desired an ultimately flexible amp to cover all bases. Indeed, Orange Rockerverbs are popular among sessions players for use on stage and in the studio.

After Orange began receiving requests to build an effects loop into the AD30, the company instead decided to design a new amp from the bottom up. Featuring a valve-driven effects loop (the first amp of its kind, no less), the Rockerverb 50 and 100 amps were revamped in 2010 with the launch of the MKII versions, though their much-loved Pics Only-style crunch character was retained.

The current incarnations of the Rockerverb – the MKIII amps – are available in orange and black livery and feature selectable output power options. As per the 'MKI' and MKII Rockerverbs, a combo version of the MKIII is available.

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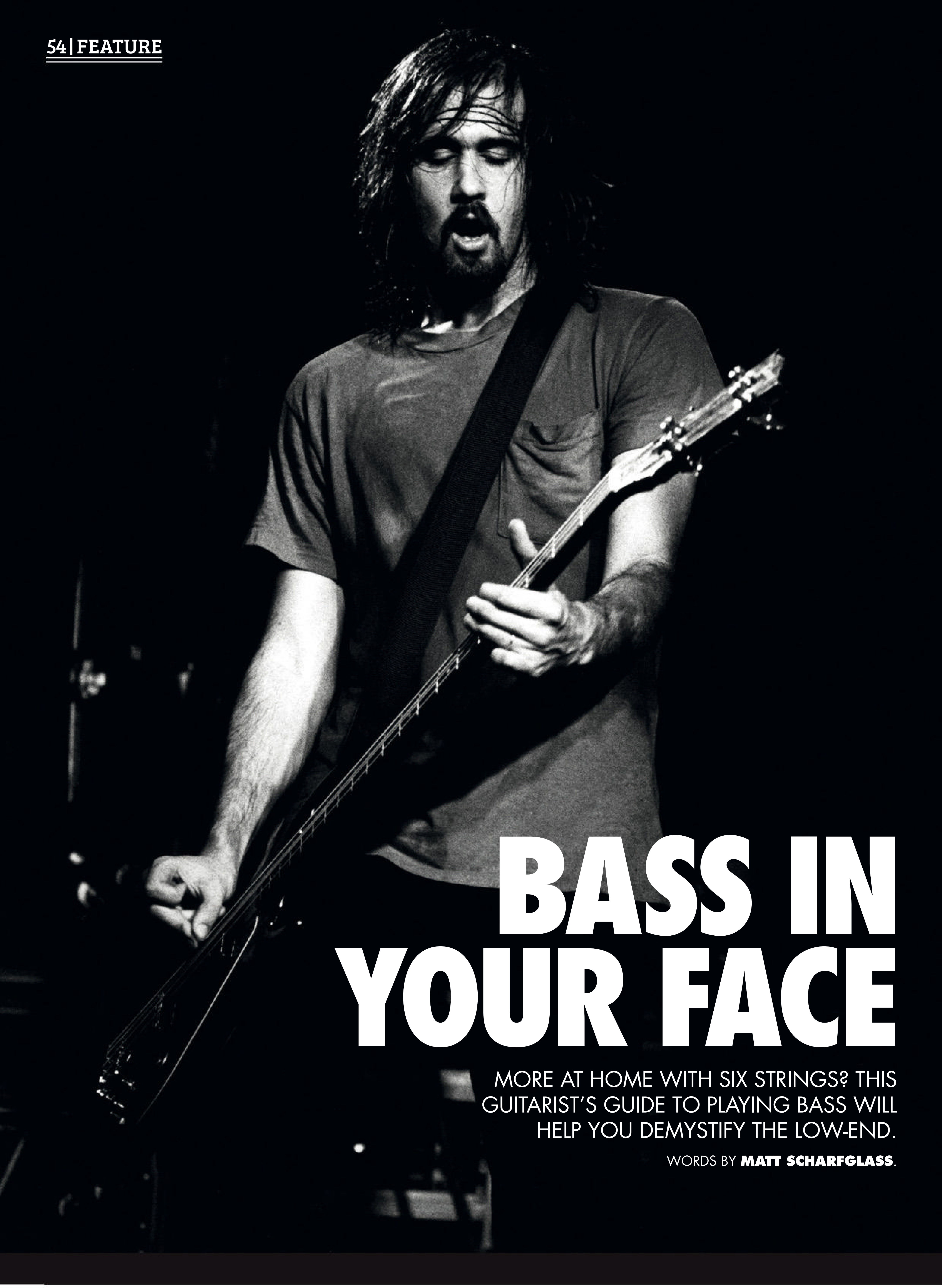


# BASS IN YOUR FACE

MORE AT HOME WITH SIX STRINGS? THIS GUITARIST'S GUIDE TO PLAYING BASS WILL HELP YOU DEMYSTIFY THE LOW-END.

WORDS BY **MATT SCHARFGLASS**.

Bass is more than just a guitar with two fewer strings. It has a different tone, scale length, feel and musical role, and in many cases it requires a different conceptual and technical approach. Guitarists who are new to playing bass will often double the guitar part one octave lower. There is certainly a place for lockstep octave doubling – just listen to Aerosmith's 'Sweet Emotion', Led Zeppelin's 'The Ocean' and Pantera's 'I'm Broken'. But there is so much more that can be done with the bass guitar.

As a bassist who later took up guitar, I have developed 20 general guidelines that I live by when I play the bass. Apply them to the instrument, and hear your playing improve as they help you to think and play like a real bass guitarist.

### 1. PLAY FOR THE SONG

More often than not, solid bass playing requires that you exercise restraint and subtlety rather than showcase your technique and slick moves. In many situations, it's best to work mostly with the root notes of the chords and lock in with the drummer's kick and snare drums.

### 2. LEARN TO WALK

Walking bass originated in jazz and blues, but it has since been adopted in other styles. The term refers to a way of playing in which the bass line remains in perpetual motion as opposed to staying on or reiterating one note. The line walks from one chord's root note up or down to the next, mostly in a quarter-note rhythm, with the occasional embellishment.

To achieve this, you use transition notes to smoothly connect the dots and bridge the gap between different root notes as the chords change. The transition notes can be any combination of chord tones (arpeggios), scale tones that relate to the chords, or chromatic passing tones.

In general, chord tones are the musically safest bet, as they sound harmonically consonant, while scale tones add a touch of light dissonance when heard against an underlying chord. The more chromatic notes that are used, the more dissonant the line becomes, as these notes momentarily clash with the prevailing chord. Whether this is a good thing or not is up to your discretion and instincts.

Figure #1 shows a stock blues walking bass line. Although the line is rhythmically animated, with staccato (short, clipped) swing eighth notes and a triplet fill at the end of each bar, it is fairly tame harmonically, as it uses mostly chord tones (the root, fifth and dominant seventh) with a brief chromatic run-up to the fifth.

By contrast, Figure #2 illustrates a jazz-style walking bass line played over these same two chords for which chromatic passing tones are liberally employed. Note the difference in contour between these two examples, the first being very angular and the second being smooth and rolling. Also note the use of dead notes (indicated by Xs in the notation), which help propel the line. These are performed by picking the string while lightly muting it with the fret hand.

When crafting a walking bass line, it's best to land on the root note whenever there's a chord change. If you're staying on the same chord for several bars, it's a good idea to play the root on the downbeat of every other bar or every fourth bar, depending on how grounded you want the line to sound.

The walking bass concept isn't just for swing grooves and can be also employed with great results in a rock context with an even-eighths feel. Inspired by Herbie Flowers' tasteful bass work on David Bowie's 1974 hit 'Rebel Rebel', Figure #3 is a fairly straightforward example of a great way to use scalar passing tones and fills to spice up a bass line over a repeating two-chord progression.

### 3. LOCK IN WITH THE DRUMMER

In a rhythm section, part of the bass guitar's role is to function as a liaison between the drums and the rest of the band. In most cases you want to make the bass and drums sound like one entity, and a great way to do this is to craft bass lines that fit like a glove with the drummer's kick and snare drums.

Using octave root notes is often an excellent way to do this, the low octave corresponding to the kick drum and the high octave hitting with the snare, typically on beats two and four, which are also known as the backbeats. Octaves allow you to create an active bass line with an interesting, angular melodic contour without clashing harmonically with the underlying chords, as the octave root note agrees perfectly with the chord.

Grooving doesn't necessarily mean playing the same thing over and over. John Paul Jones' playing throughout Led Zeppelin's The Lemon Song is a perfect case in point, as he embellishes the groove and stays within the bass' role as a support instrument for six solid minutes without repeating himself once.

### 4. USE OCTAVES AND FIFTHS

After the octave root, the fifth is the most harmonically agreeable note you can play. Many classic bass lines have been constructed using mostly roots, octaves and fifths as the framework. The great thing about this approach is that it allows you to create a bass line that is interesting and melodic, locks in perfectly with the drums and doesn't clash harmonically with

**FIGURE 1** blues walking bass line

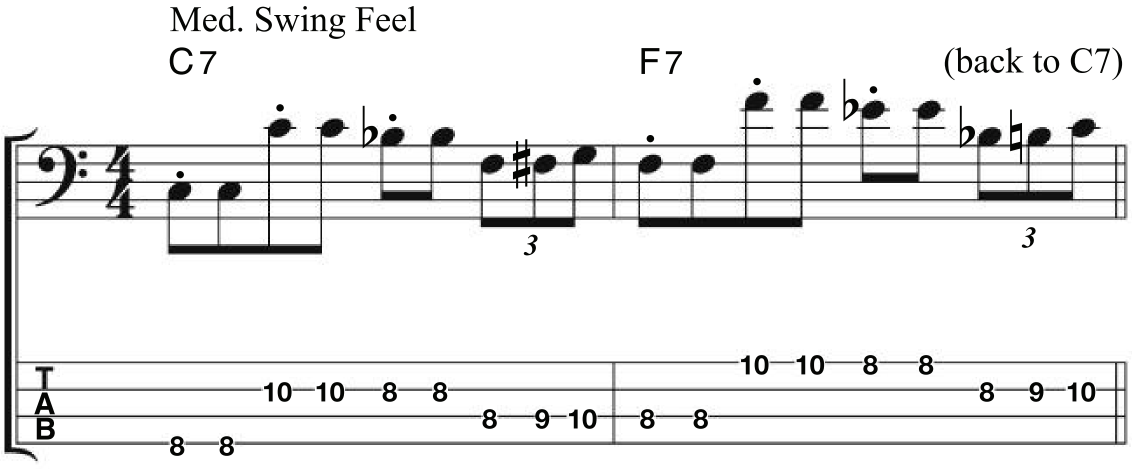



**FIGURE 2**

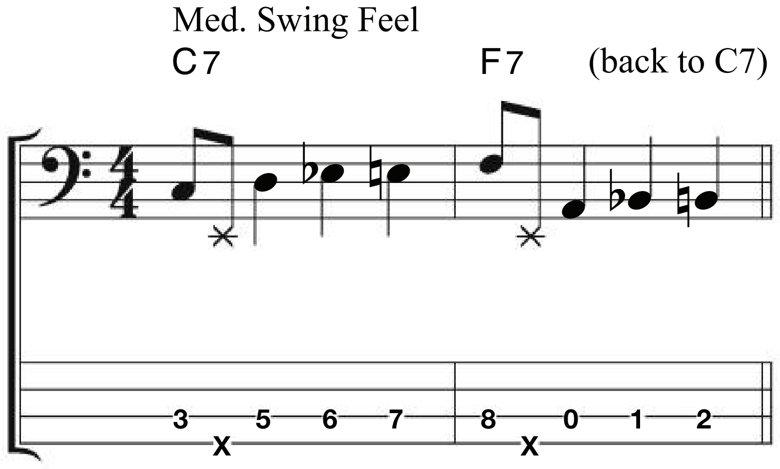



**FIGURE 3** rock walking bass line ♩= 124

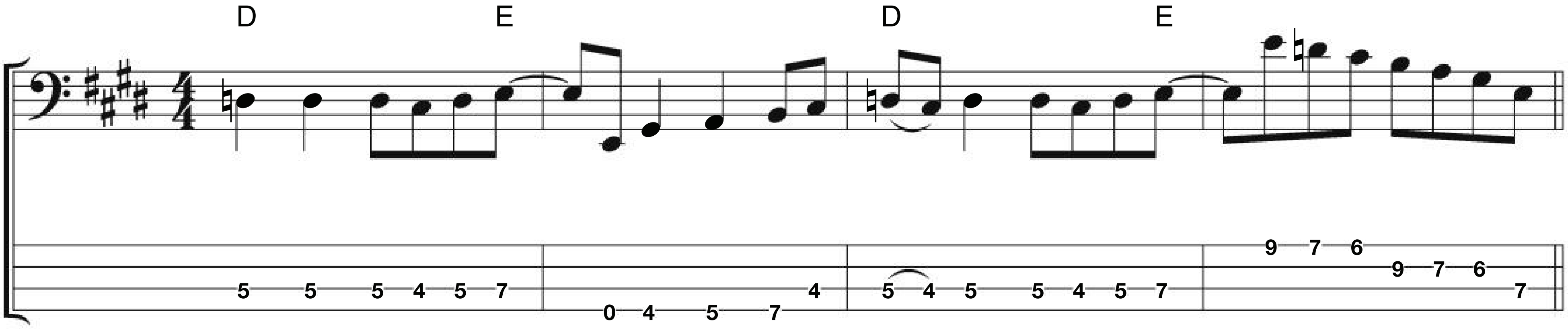


**FIGURE 4 roots, octaves and fifths ♩= 78**

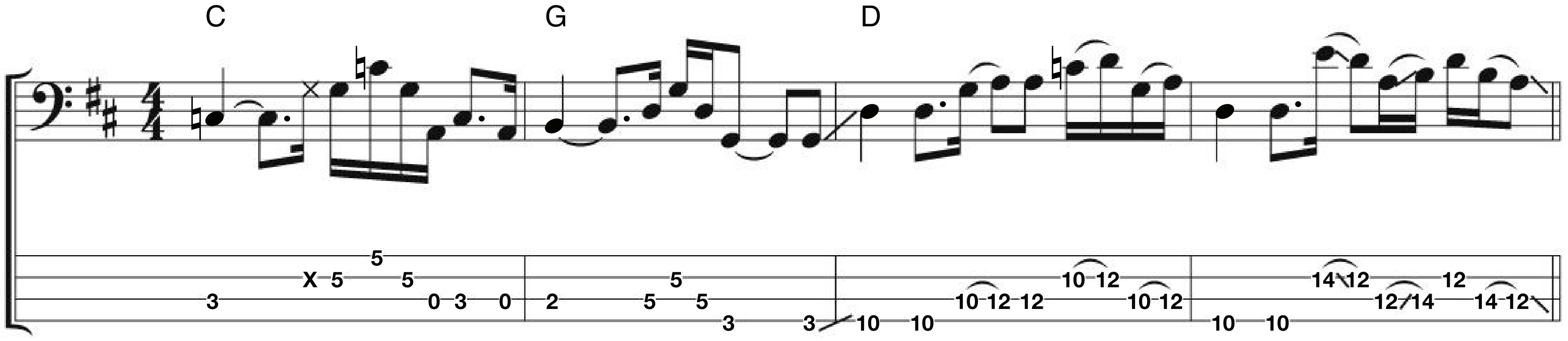



**FIGURE 5a picking aggressively near the neck (rock) ♩= 76**

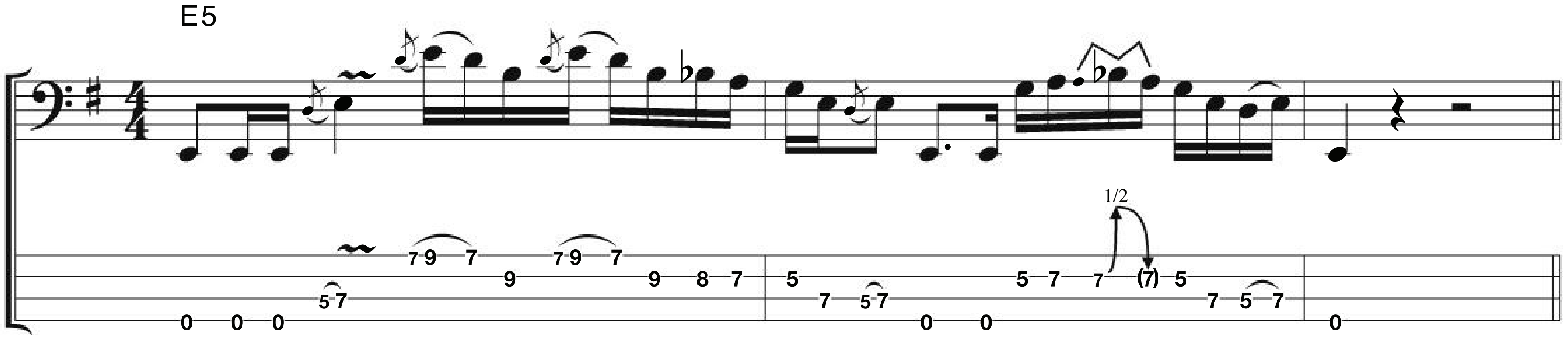
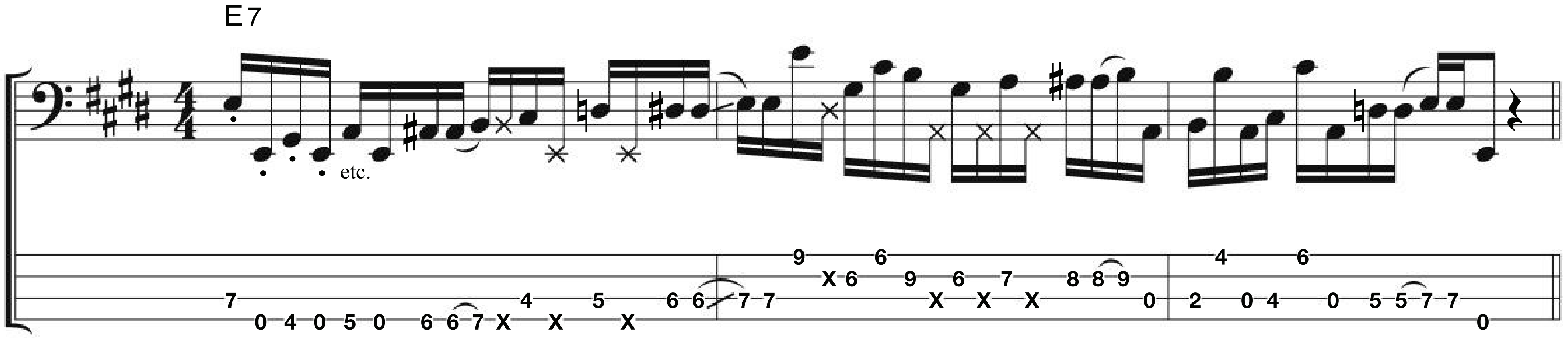



**FIGURE 5b picking near the bridge (funk) ♩= 104**




the underlying chords.

Figure #4 is an example of this kind of approach, inspired by John Paul Jones' nimble playing on Led Zeppelin's 'Thank You'.

## 5. TONE IS IN THE HANDS

This old adage could not ring truer for bass playing. Plucking the strings hard and near the base of the fretboard (Figure #5a) like Black Sabbath's Geezer Butler makes them slap against it; plucking the strings near the bridge with just the very tips of your fingers (Figure #5b) lets you get that punchy Jaco Pastorius/Rocco Prestia machine-gun 16th-note attack.

You can go from a dull thud to a sharp, funky punch simply by choosing where along the string you pick it and how aggressively you hit it. Between that, your pickup selector (if your bass has one) and tone controls, you have a considerable range of tonal possibilities before the signal even hits the amp.

## 6. TO PICK OR NOT TO PICK?

Not all bassists use their fingers to pluck the instrument. Megadeth's David Ellefson, Rex Brown of Pantera and Down, Yes' Chris Squire and Paul McCartney use a pick, and John Paul Jones, The Who's John Entwistle and Michael Anthony in his Van Halen days were known for switching from fingers to pick depending on the song.

If playing with a pick works for you, go for it. I recommend the large, non-celluloid kind, such as Dunlop's Tortex Triangle, with a thick gauge (at least one millimetre).

The large surface area of the big triangle picks is well suited to the wide spacing of bass strings and will help you keep a grip on the pick. Tortex (or Delrin, depending on the manufacturer) is also sturdier than celluloid and less likely to break, and the thick, unbendable gauge will allow you to get more volume and power out of those thick strings, with less effort.

## 7. SINGLE-FINGER TECHNIQUE

Some record producers actually prefer having bass players use a pick because the attack is more even. But if you're a fingerstyle player and want to achieve a more consistent attack, try using only one finger, such as the index (instead of alternating between the index and middle fingers) as much as possible.

John Paul Jones copped this technique from Motown bass legend James Jamerson and made great use of it on several classic Led Zeppelin tracks, such as 'Good Times Bad Times' and 'Ramble On'.

## 8. GET YOUR TIME SOLID

Someone has to keep the tempo steady, and if the drummer can't, than the bassist has to. The pocket depends on you, so learn how to be your own metronome. Don't just count in 4/4 – you should also feel in 8/8, especially when playing ballads, where the tendency to rush the tempo is greater. To help you land on the beat more accurately, listen to the drummer's hi-hat or ride cymbal, not just his kick and snare drums.

## 9. TO FILL OR NOT TO FILL?

Fills are the little pieces of ear candy that embellish a solid bass line and help propel a song. Listen to how other bass players set up a new section, and shamelessly jack anything that grabs your ear. Playing fills that conclude one section of a song (such as a verse) and lead into the next (such as the chorus) is a great way to break monotony in a bass part and set yourself apart from whatever the guitarist is doing.

Filling is an art form in and of itself, in that there's a fine line between adding to the song or groove and obscuring it and detracting from it. In keeping with the "bass-and-drums-as-one" concept, make your fills coincide with a drummer's so that they sound like the same person's idea being expressed.

If a drummer plays a fill, it's usually at the end of every second, fourth or eighth bar, so listen to the drums and pick your spots to fill accordingly. Of course, all your playing decisions should depend on the style of music you're playing, and

some styles, such as hip-hop or club music, are more about maintaining a relentless groove, with very little variation.

For examples of great fills, check out R&B and soul session players such as James Jamerson (countless Motown hits), Chuck Rainey (Aretha Franklin, Steely Dan) and Nathan Watts (especially on Stevie Wonder's 'Do I Do'), or rock players such as Rex Brown, Stone Temple Pilots' Robert DeLeo (another Jamerson disciple) and Duff McKagan of Guns N' Roses. And don't let genre get in the way – just because it's a Motown fill doesn't mean it can't be used in a rock context, and vice versa.

### 10. OCTAVE APPROPRIATE

Are you playing in the right register (octave)? Perhaps that cool part you came up with sounds badass played down low but may be too heavy for the mood of the song. Or perhaps it's too high and is interfering with the vocal or guitar part. Make sure your note-range choices are right for the situation.

### 11. AVOID LOW-B OBSESSION

If you're playing a five-string, don't just play sub-E notes, as it can become annoying. It's one thing to hit a low B or C every now and then for dramatic effect and to show everyone who's boss, but unless you're in a Korn or Type O Negative tribute band, don't live there.

### 12. SUBSTITUTE DIFFERENT CHORD TONES

Occasionally playing the third or fifth of the underlying chord instead of its root note can radically change the whole feel of a chord progression, and when done tastefully it can add warmth or tension.

This device has been used for centuries by great classical composers like Bach and Beethoven and creates what are known as chord inversions. Master pop songwriters such as Elton John and Paul McCartney use inversions, via bass line substitutions, to build their chord progressions to a harmonic climax. Realise that the ear reckons harmony from the ground up, so as a bass player you have the power to dictate how the chord is going to sound and fundamentally change its character.

Figure #6 is an example of a common rock chord progression for which the bass line takes a left turn (in bars #2 and #3) to create chord inversions. In the second and third bars, instead of playing the roots (shown in cue-size notes and tab numbers), the third or fifth of the chord are substituted, creating a continually ascending and more melodic bass line in the process.

### 13. GREASE

It's that grimy, funky stuff that oozes between the beats. With all due respect to hardcore prog-rock bands, for which precision is key, rock and roll has always been more about attitude and spirit.

This isn't an excuse to be sloppy and unmusical, but more an exhortation to make low, rumbling noises and revel in it. Listen to John Paul Jones' low-end grumble during the "Hey baby, oh baby, pretty baby" chorus section of Zeppelin's Black Dog (played with a pick) or Black Sabbath's Geezer Butler on pretty much any song.

For a more modern take, check out session legend Pino Palladino's work on D'Angelo's Voodoo album. In some situations, it's perfectly okay to make excessive fret noise, be a little behind the beat or slide out of a note perhaps a bit longer than you should, as long as it's not disruptive to the music and contributes to the intended vibe.

**FIGURE 6** substituting other chord tones instead of roots ♩ = 116

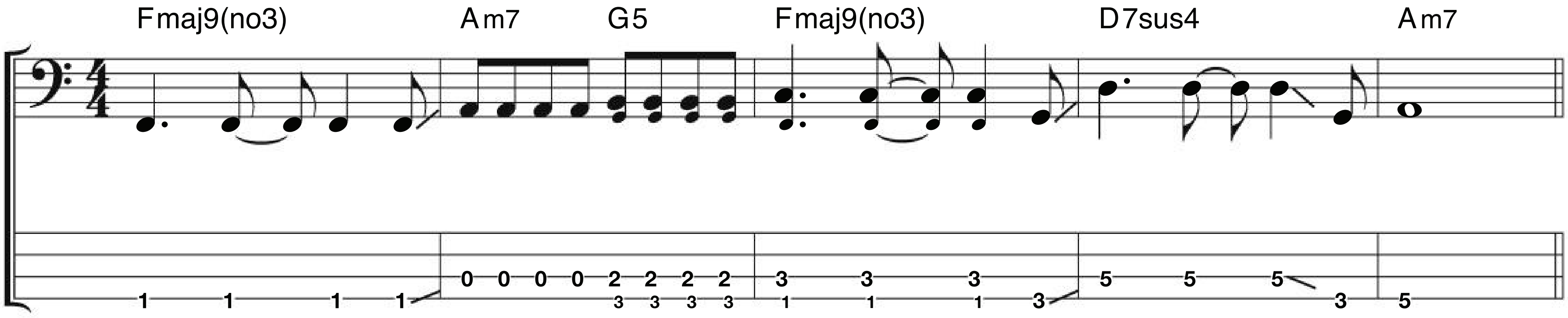
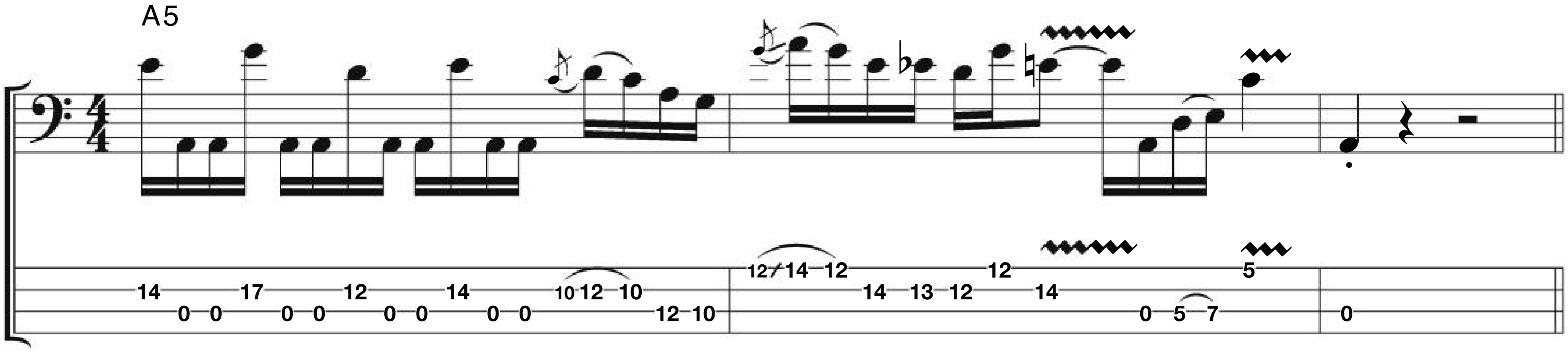



**FIGURE 7** fret-hand shakes ♩ = 96



### 14. SHAKE IT

I'm not talking about a long trill or extreme vibrato but literally shaking a pitch. Fret the note, pick it, then quickly slide, hammer on or pull off to another fret and back, as demonstrated in Figure #7. Regardless of what style you're playing, the resulting sound is funky and adds a little extra kick to the sound of the rhythm section. Sure, guitarists can do this too, but it just doesn't sound the same (or as good) on that little instrument.

### 15. USE DEAD NOTES AND RAKES

Just as you might mute the strings on your guitar with your fretting hand while you strum "chucka-chucka," the same principle and function applies to bass, whether it's funk (Figure #8) or hard rock (Figure #9). Rakes on a bass are executed a bit differently than on guitar: you perform them by dragging a picking finger across the strings in an upstroke, usually in a specified rhythm, as demonstrated in Figure #10.

### 16. ARTICULATION VARIATION

As a guitarist, you employ all sorts of techniques to convey your musical statements, and you can do that on bass, too. Check out session legend Will Lee's work in Dionne Warwick's 'Déjà Vu'. Lee makes use of rakes, palm muting while picking with his thumb, slapping, and finger slides in addition to plain-old conventional fingerstyle playing (Figure #11). And he does it without ever interrupting the groove or getting in the way of the vocal.

### 17. IT'S ALL BASS

A cool bass part is a cool bass part, regardless of what instrument it was played on, be it electric bass, synth or piano, so be open to hearing new ideas. Next time you're at that bar and hear house or club music blasting over the sound system, listen to the bass lines. No matter how far-flung it is from your preferred musical style, you can translate it to your own bass playing.

### 18. LESS IS MORE

Take 'September', one of Earth, Wind & Fire's most enduring tunes. Bassist Verdine White is capable of playing so much more, but in this song his bass line is almost rudimentary. Even so, it's funky as hell, making great use of rests and staccato phrasing – space between notes –and, without fail, people get up and move as soon as that bass line kicks in.

For a more modern example, listen to Branden Campbell of Neon Trees. His lines never get more complicated than eighth notes with the rare fill, but his fat tone and solid playing more than adequately complement drummer Elaine Bradley's grooves and help propel the songs.

### 19. MORE IS MORE

A master groove monster like Juan Nelson from Ben Harper's band can lull you into a groove, then hit you with a fill like the one heard at 4:30 in 'Faded', from *The Will To Live*. The groove and lick shown in Figure #12 draws its inspiration from this approach.

### 20. LET IT ALL HANG OUT

What do you want people to hear in your playing? Anger? Joy? Whatever it is, get in that zone and play it like you mean it. Whether you're a shredder or a feel-driven player, express yourself. Because if you're not connecting with people, what's the point?

**FIGURE 8** dead notes (funk) ♩ = 104

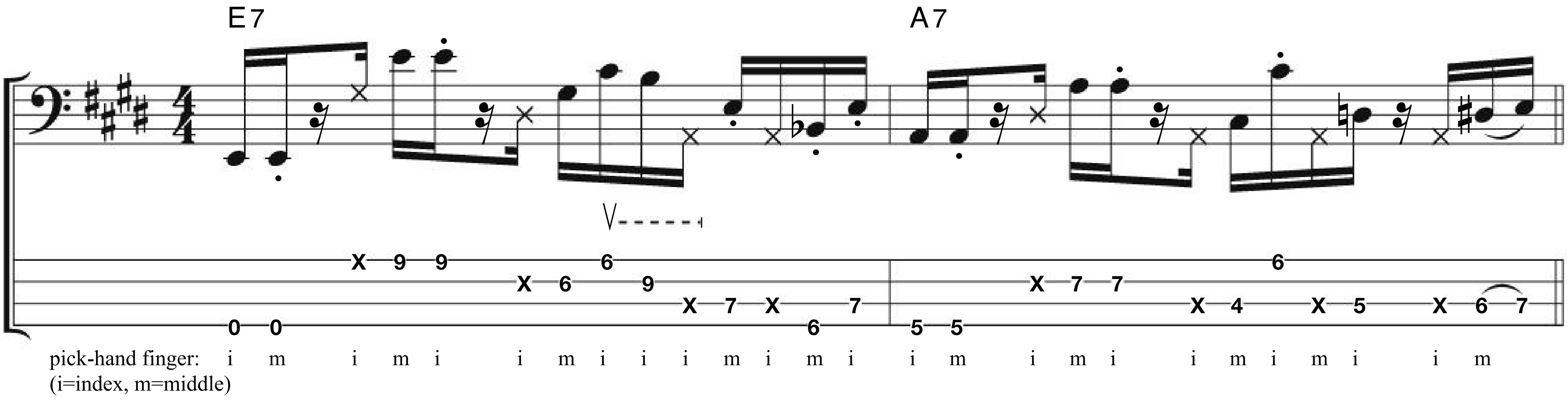



**FIGURE 9** dead notes (rock) ♩ = 70

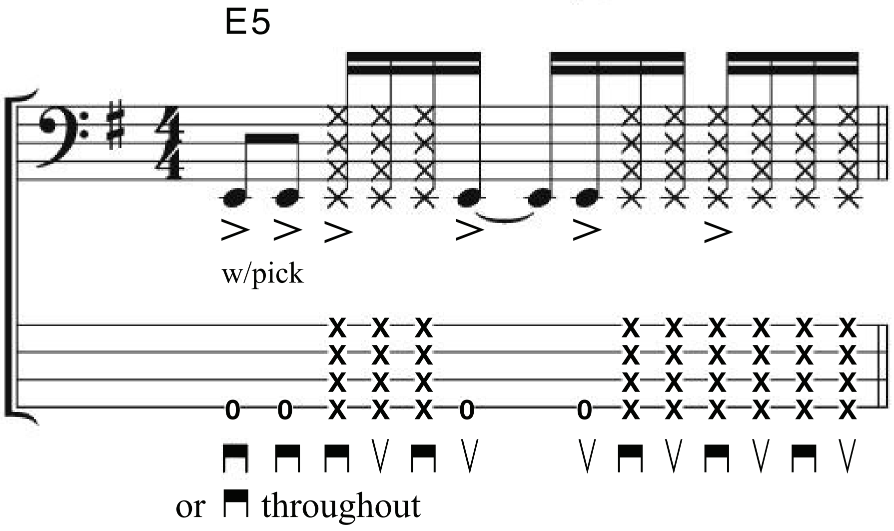



**FIGURE 10** dead notes/rakes (funk) ♩ = 116

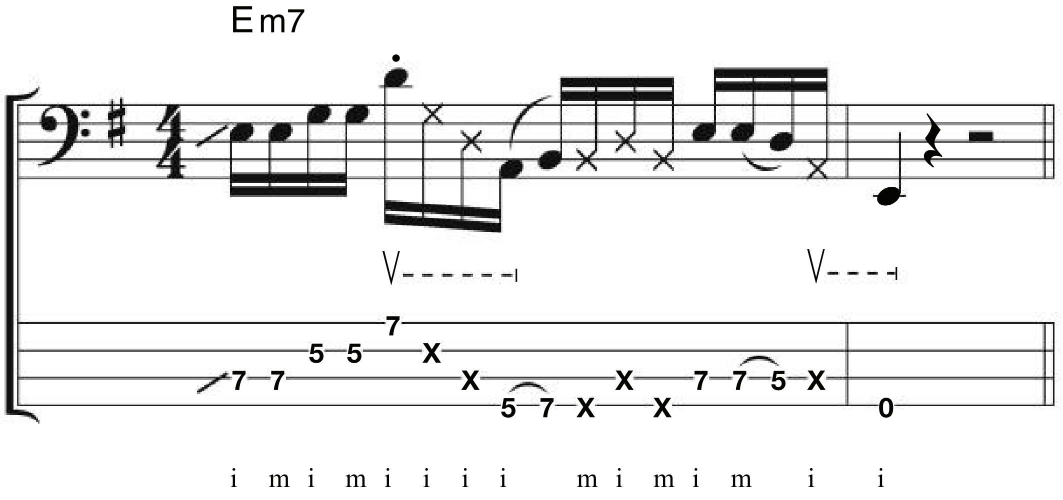
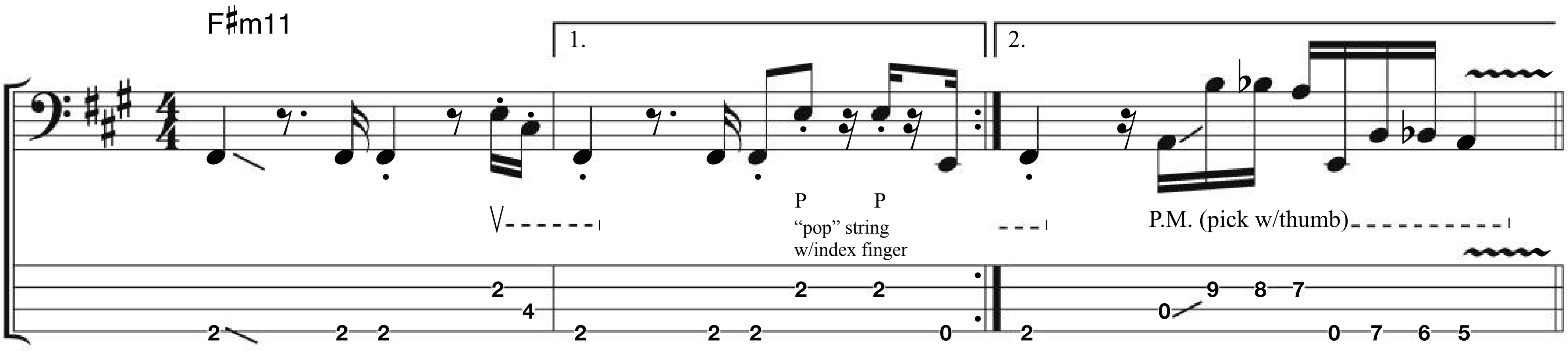



**FIGURE 11** using different techniques within a bass line, in the style of Will Lee ♩ = 73



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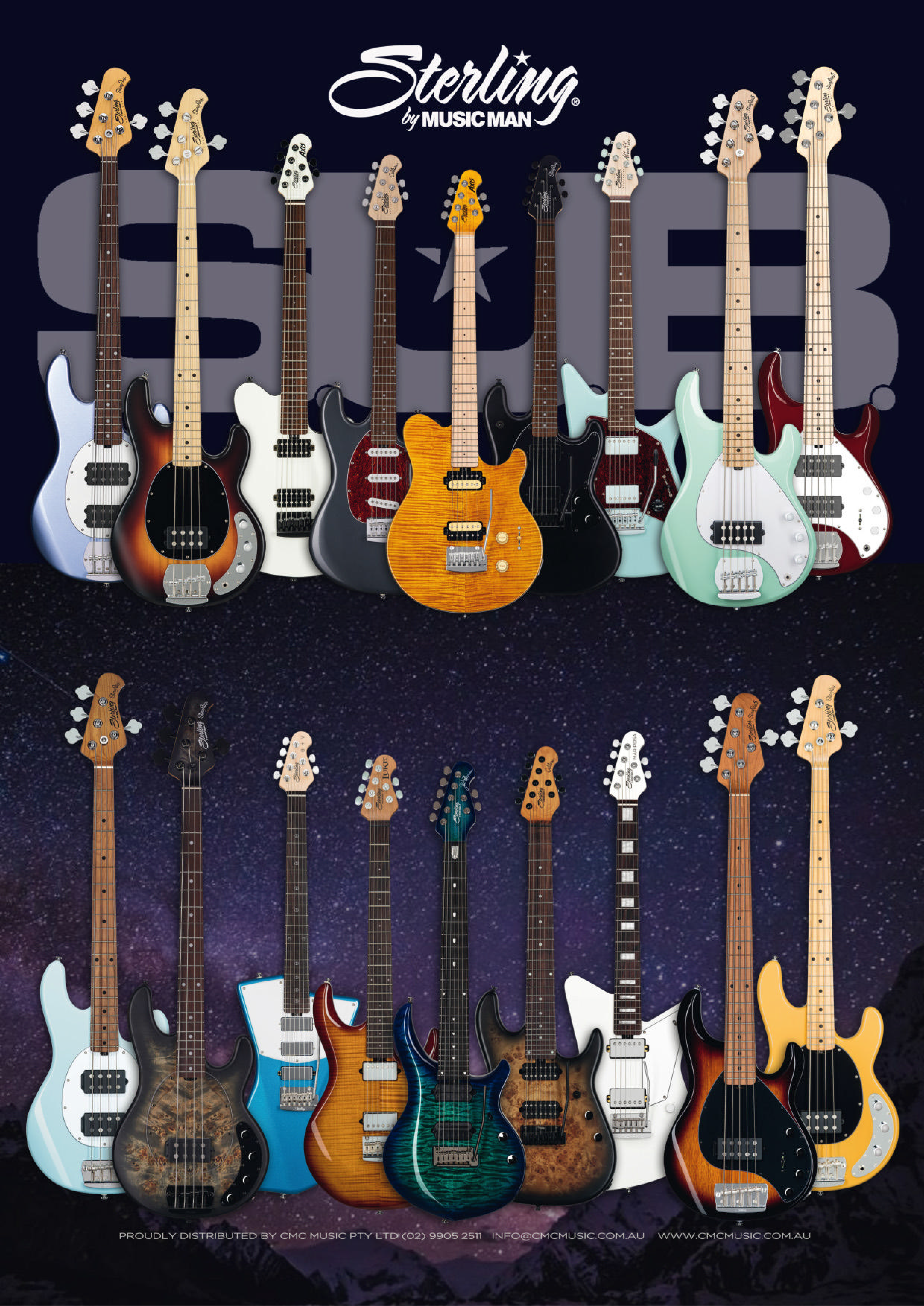
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# MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

ASTRONAUT **CHRIS SEMBROSKI** TOOK A MARTIN UKULELE TO SPACE AND DISCOVERED THE JOY OF MAKING MUSIC IN MICROGRAVITY.

WORDS BY **JIMMY LESLIE**. PHOTO BY **JOHN KRAUS**.

If you strum a ukulele in space, does it make a sound? In Chris Sembroski's case, it certainly makes a difference. The Air Force veteran won the Generosity seat on the first-ever all civilian crew for SpaceX's Inspiration4 mission. With a donation to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, the U.S. Space Camp counsellor and Lockheed Martin data engineer was entered in the contest that ultimately punched his ticket beyond the stratosphere. He brought a Martin soprano ukulele designed specially for the mission aboard and played it in space.

The other members of Inpiration4 included commander and benefactor Jared Isaacman representing Leadership, Dr. Sian Proctor representing Prosperity and Hayley Arcenaux representing Hope. Arcenaux is a cancer survivor who was treated at St. Jude's and now works there. The Netflix documentary *Countdown: Inspiration4 Mission To Space,* introduced the crew to the world prior to the September 15th launch, which SpaceX streamed live. Watching the Dragon capsule engulfed in flames as it burst forth made the extraordinary danger level extremely obvious. After orbiting the earth over three days at the highest altitude ever – beyond the International Space Station – the crew splashed down safely in the Atlantic.

It was truly inspirational to watch civilians train and transform into superheroes. It's in that spirit that we approached Sembroski. He's a musical hobbyist rather than the kind of acoustic fabuloso normally featured in Frets, but he certainly has a fabulous story to tell about a mind-blowing musical experience playing in space.

Martin Guitar has long been a champion of exploration and continues to push the envelope of guitar sustainability. The historic manufacturer created a commemorative ukulele made from sustainably sourced sinker mahogany in a soprano size similar to the model "ukulele" Dick Konter brought along on Admiral Richard Byrd's 1926 pioneer mission to the North Pole. Inspiration4 has clear parallels to that historic trek, and represents another giant step for civilian musical adventurers like Ukulele Dick and Chris 'Hanks' Sembroski.

**What was the impetus for making some music on this mission?**

This mission represents the democratisation of space, and so it resonates with me that as we try to bring more humans into space, we want to bring more of our humanity with us. As a member of the first all-civilian crew, I thought it would be a good idea to bring some music into space. I figured I could make that contribution. My entire family is musical, but I'm the only one that has really picked up the guitar, and then this summer the ukulele, as my favourite form of musical expression and outlet for creativity.

**Can you cite a favourite player or two?**

I love listening to Dave Matthews, and John Mayer is a heck of a guitar player. I'm blown away by the way his mind works and how it follows a different pattern, compared to how music gets taught in school. These guitar players are not strictly confined to, say, the four beats of a measure, one measure at a time. They've

**"IT RESONATES WITH ME THAT AS WE TRY TO BRING MORE HUMANS INTO SPACE, WE WANT TO BRING MORE OF OUR HUMANITY WITH US."**

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got this whole circle of rhythm and melody that comes together.

I think it was Dave Matthews' drummer [Carter Beauford] who said that to play a rhythmic pattern with all its syncopation until it comes back around, you have to think like you're playing on a circle: Find the moments where those different highlights and beats land. Imagine that circle goes on for 16 or 32 counts, or however long it's extended, and as you come around full circle, then you know exactly where you're landing each time you arrive at home.

**Kind of like an orbit?**

Right. And then there's the nature of acoustics. My parents were always involved with our church music program, and because of that background I pay attention to the acoustics at a concert. I listen for those resonant frequencies booming throughout the show. There are neat acoustics happening when you're flying in space around Earth in a Dragon capsule.

The fans create a constant white noise, which is okay, because it covers a lot of sins. The acoustics of the cabin are unique, because all the walls are hard but nothing is symmetrical about the way the sound bounces off of them. It's like you're playing in a shower with great acoustics.

And it's not a cube or a rectangular shower either, so the sound doesn't come back in an overpowering way. Those hard-sided walls give the sound back to your ears in very present way. You feel right there with the music as it's bouncing around and filling the capsule. But then the sound dissipates just as quickly. You don't get that long, sustaining reverb there. You feel free, and it sounds good to just sort of belt it out a bit, because then you're not drowned out by the fans. It's actually a very fun place to play.

**How did you wind up bringing along a Martin ukulele?**

Martin is located close to where the ships were headquartered in Pennsylvania. A guitar would have been too big, so I agreed to try a ukulele. They sent me a wonderful tenor-sized ukulele that I fell in love with and sent down to SpaceX, but it turned out to be a couple of inches too big to fit in the box. I was devastated. Martin flipped into overdrive. They were able to produce a soprano ukulele and turn it in to SpaceX within about a week and a half. It felt tiny in my hands compared to the way my fingers were used to landing on the frets. I resolved to think tiny and skinny in order to get my fingers to push down on those strings in a way that worked.

**What did you think of its tone?**

I was pleasantly surprised, and it was louder than I expected. That Martin ukulele has an incredible resonance that really does fill the space. And having been newly manufactured, it had that new wood smell. I couldn't get enough of it. It's an incredible historic parallel that another Martin soprano ukulele traveled along the surface of the Earth to the North Pole, and that this one covered about 60 percent of the Earth's surface flying 580 kilometres above it. I was playing music, going over everybody's houses at 17,000 miles per hour!

**What were the primary player moments?**

There were two. The first time was during a show-and-tell session. I had just finished breakfast and found out we were going live shortly. While the camera was on Hayley and Sian showing off the cupola – the big domed window above – I dove underneath the seats to pull out the ukulele. I was thinking about something representative I could play in a few moments, so I put a few G, F, and C chords together to make it sound like a song.

The other moment was one I wanted to do for the crew, and I'd been thinking about it the whole time. After watching President Biden's inauguration celebration, I kept thinking about the Black Pumas and how their song 'Colors' fit perfectly with what we were going to be seeing in space. Looking down from that altitude, all of the colours you see are those back here on Earth. And I was going to be up there with people that have become, like the song says, *"my sisters and my brothers"*. Listening to that song and hearing those higher guitar notes, I thought it would come across on a ukulele pretty well.

Martin helped me out. They sent [indie pop singer-songwriter] A.J. Smith to give me a couple of lessons. He helped me rearrange where my fingers were on the fretboard so that it would come across better. It was rough to get those fingerings down, especially on the soprano. I was anxious about having personally committed myself to try singing a song that's probably too high for my voice, but the crew was very receptive.

**"WE'RE ALL CONNECTED IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM AS WE'RE GOING AROUND THE SUN, AND THE PLANETS HAVE THIS CONTINUOUS RHYTHMIC CYCLE TO HOW THEY ORBIT THE SUN. THAT'S WHAT MUSIC IS TOO."**

They all loved that song to begin with, and it became our theme song for the mission. They were very kind to me when I ended up actually playing the song and getting into it. It was one of those moments where, if you can just let go and not think about what you're doing, take a few deep breaths and play, the music just kind of comes up and you connect better with people.

**So you feel that you pulled it off?**

I messed it up so bad. [*Laughs*] I got so nervous. That was literally the scariest part of this whole mission for me. Jared caught a little video, maybe the beginning of a verse through to the chorus. We will have to see if that gets out in public. At the very beginning of the Netflix documentary there is a couple of bars of me picking out the 'Colors' intro that you might recognise if you look for it.

**What's it like physically to play while floating around in microgravity?**

You've got to hold that little soprano in a different way, using your right forearm to kind of lean the body up against your stomach to keep it anchored. You've also got to hold loosely with your left hand so that you don't get too stuck in one position where you can't transition between different chord structures.

I ended up going into the cupola to play more of the technical stuff that I was trying to do with 'Colors'. There were some places where I could get my feet anchored below me and have room to take a few deep breaths. I would essentially go up into this bubble and turn it into my little gym and music recording area.

**Did the lack of a strong gravitational pull affect string vibrations?**

I didn't notice a whole lot of that. Granted, it would be different outside, with no air for the strings to vibrate against. The only sense of sound you would hear would be through anything that is touching the ukulele, such as your hand, your chest, back up through your own body to your eardrums. That would be the only path for sound to come through. Isn't that a big part of what music is anyway? You feel it in your chest, depending on how it resonates.

**And what about the duration of string vibrations in outer space?**

There's still tension, so it would continue to move back and forth. It might take longer to slow down or...

**Endless sustain?**

Yeah, my assumption is that it would simply keep going in the absence of air causing friction to slow it down. The energy has to be dissipated somewhere for the string or the musical instrument to slow down its vibrations. It would just continue.

**Having had such an otherworldly experience, can you draw a larger musical correlation between what's happening in space to what's happening on Earth?**

We're all connected in the solar system as we're going around the sun, and the planets have this continuous rhythmic cycle to how they orbit the sun. That's what music is too. It's this continuous, repetitive pattern of different intonations that bring the colours of a song or a whole piece of music together. Without that happening in the solar system, we wouldn't have everything on Earth that makes it such a special place to live.

**The earthly correlation to what you just accomplished might be a casual guitarist getting a chance to play Carnegie Hall. What can you relay from your training and experience to aspiring players?**

No matter what you're doing, be willing to stay humble and not afraid to say "yes" when it comes to taking on challenges or risks, putting yourself out there and exposing your weaknesses. You only get better.

At the end of the day, it's still just you doing what you love, no matter what a critic says. And if someone lets you take the opportunity to express yourself in any way, know that you're going to be surrounded by people that are putting themselves through the exact same thing, and they'll help you out. They'll be supportive no matter what. I found that to be the case with my crew.

# CLASSIC ADVENTURES IN HI-FI

ARMED WITH A RICKENBACKER AND A FENDER TWIN, **PETER BUCK** HELPED **R.E.M.** PUT ALTERNATIVE ROCK ON THE MAP. PRODUCER **MITCH EASTER** REVEALS THE TECHNIQUE BEHIND THE JANGLE POP.

WORDS BY **JOE BOSSO**.

Before it was alternative rock, it was post-punk, and before that it was garage rock. For a brief period in the early '80s, however, the preferred nomenclature was "college rock", and the undisputed kings of the scene were R.E.M. "Sometimes terms can be such funny things," says Mitch Easter, the North Carolina-based producer and musician who guided the sessions for R.E.M.'s first four recordings. "'College rock' – we never took that one seriously. We just thought, Oh, college stations are playing the music? That's good. It wasn't something we really bothered ourselves with."

By 1980, Easter was already something of a happening music figure in and around his hometown of Winston-Salem. He had played guitar in a number of local bands, some of them featuring his childhood pal Chris Stamey, who would go on to achieve indie success as a member of the dB's and as a solo performer. That same year, Easter eyed a move into production, so he converted his parents' garage into a small recording space and dubbed it the Drive-In Studio, offering super-low rates as an enticement to young talent.

"I had 16 tracks," Easter recalls. "It was the beginning of the indie studio scene, and a lot of small places only had eight tracks, which is perfectly legit. But I wanted to leapfrog that and go into what I considered to be big-time pro recording. We had a simple console, a handful of microphones and two compressors, and I also had a two-inch 3M tape machine from a studio in Atlanta. The Drive-In was pretty new when R.E.M. came in. I had recorded three or four bands there by then, but I was still puttering around and getting it figured out."

Only together for a year at the time, R.E.M. – guitarist Peter Buck, singer Michael Stipe, bassist Mike Mills and drummer Bill Berry – were growing out of the blossoming music scene of Athens, Georgia, and Easter quickly recognised they were different from many of the groups of the day.

"A lot of bands simply wanted to fit in, but R.E.M. always wanted to be themselves," he says. "I guess a correct way of putting it would be 'cocky.' They were like, 'We rule. Here we come, so get out of the way.' It wasn't so much a careerist mindset; rather, it was their insistence on pure artistry. They meant it. When I first heard them, I thought, Yes. I know what to do with this. This is going to be great."

Easter produced R.E.M.'s first single, 1981's 'Radio Free Europe', released on the tiny, Atlanta-based Hib-Tone label. A year later, he recorded the band's debut for I.R.S. Records, the five-song EP *Chronic Town*. For the group's first full-length album, 1983's *Murmur* – and its follow-up, 1984's *Reckoning* – operations shifted to Reflection Studios in nearby Charlotte, where Easter assumed co-producing and engineering duties with his old friend Don Dixon.

"I.R.S. insisted on us using 24 tracks for the albums, and Reflection was a great studio," Easter says. "Don had worked there a lot, so we were a good match. He's a good musician and a really good recording guy, and he improved the outcome of everything we did."

The importance of those four recordings cannot be overstated. By distilling the essential elements of garage rock, post-punk, country and even folk into their own special concoction – one that was by turns spooky and engaging, enigmatic and fiercely direct – R.E.M. created a sound that seemed to exist in a previously unchartered world, and they provided inspiration to countless young bands to follow suit.

Over the years, and while working with a succession of different producers (Joe Boyd, Don Gehman, Scott Litt, Pat McCarthy and Jacknife Lee), the band pulled off something rare and magical in the annals of music, opening up their sound enough to crack the mainstream while retaining their idiosyncratic ambitions.

"I've always been a bit surprised at some of the musical analysis of R.E.M.," Easter says, "because to me, they were always in the grand tradition of rock bands. When they came out, perhaps some of the young people who heard them didn't know garage rock. At the time, even a band like the Sex Pistols, who used to be considered so bold, now sounded like a classic band in many ways. So to hear Peter Buck, he sounded different than what everybody else was doing. I guess there's a lot of reasons why R.E.M. shot ahead. I'm just glad that I was able to be a part of it."

**Could you expand on what first struck you about R.E.M. and why you thought they were special?**

Well, the first thing I should say is, I really liked them personally. We had a good time just talking and stuff. But they struck me as the kind of band that could really do the thing. A lot of bands were cover bands, and if they wrote songs, they did so tentatively. R.E.M. had a different mindset. They weren't doing cover tunes on weekends at frats. Their attitude was, "We're a real band. We write

**"IT SEEMED LIKE GUITAR PLAYERS WERE A DIME A DOZEN, BUT PETER HAD AN IDENTIFIABLE SOUND, AND NOT THE LEAST OF THAT CAME FROM HIS EQUIPMENT CHOICES."**

our own songs." At the time, especially in our area, that was different. And, of course, musically, they were good. I didn't have to tell them how to play. They knew their music.

**What were your initial impressions of Peter Buck as a guitarist?**

I just appreciated the fact that he was distinctive. It seemed like guitar players were a dime a dozen, but Peter had an identifiable sound, and not the least of that came from his equipment choices. He played a Rickenbacker with these old, heavy flatwound strings, and I think that made him play a certain way – more deliberate and clear. And I don't mean in terms of distortion; I mean musically clear. You have to mean business when your guitar fights back like that. I thought it was great. I'd heard enough distorted fifths already, so I was delighted to hear somebody do something else.

**Which Rickenbacker model did he come in with at first?**

He had a blonde 360, and then he got the black one that everybody knows. Sometimes he would use my guitars. We'd be working on a track, and I'd say, "You know what would be great? In the chorus, maybe try out this Fender 12-string of mine." That's how the 12-string crept into some of their stuff.

**What amps was Peter using at first?**

He had a Fender Twin, and that's what we recorded with. I remember when we were doing 'Pilgrimage' [which was recorded prior to *Murmur* as a "test" for I.R.S. Records] at Reflection Studio in Charlotte, the Twin was in the shop. I didn't have anything with me, but there was a Kasino solid-state amp in the studio, so we used that, and it sounded great. I think some people might faint knowing that we used this little 25-watt solid-state practice amp, but it had a really nice sound. There were oddball things like that.

For *Murmur*, he still didn't have his amp back, so he used my Ampeg G-15. That amp and the Kasino are what's on *Murmur*. When they came in to do Reckoning, he had his Twin back. But if you're a distinctive-sounding guy like him, you sound like yourself no matter what.

**Peter could do more with his rhythm playing than a lot of two-guitar bands. Did he ever try out what we might call conventional solos?**

He would say that he didn't know how to play solos, and he was like, "And I don't care." Which I thought was fine. That attitude was in the air with punk. I mean, I like a good solo, but I've heard so many boring ones. If you don't want to solo, great – do something else. Later, he dabbled a bit, but he never really got into that, and it didn't hurt him.

**At the time, journalists applied the term 'jangle' to his sound. Did that ever bother him?**

I don't know. I mean, that word crept in, and

it built over the decades. I found it a little bit offensive, because it was always put in contrast to some sort of he-man guitar playing that was highly predictable. But I have discovered in recent years that the word has had a total rehabilitation, because when I talk to young people who come into the studio now, they think the word is totally cool. I don't know what Peter thought of it. He's the type of guy who would be like, "I don't give a shit." I feel like that the blame for that word goes entirely back to the song 'Mr. Tambourine Man'. Maybe it's been retroactively applied to The Byrds.

**Generally speaking, did you do a fair amount of guitar overdubs, or did you mainly go for a live sound?**

We always tracked like a band and recorded everything. If something needed fixing, we'd go back and fix it. They'd sit in the control room, and we'd punch in a lot. But a lot of what happened was based on what they did on the floor. They didn't make a lot of mistakes; they were an efficient band. We would add stuff, and a lot of that came from me: "This should get thicker here, so play this guitar and we'll make it fuzzy."

**There was a bit of a hiccup in the early days when the band tried working with producer Stephen Hague for *Murmur*. That didn't go so well, though.**

It's not so much they tried that out; rather, I.R.S. Records insisted they try it out. They did the session with him, and it was a bad match. He was a modern synth guy, so that was doomed from the start. Plus, he did all that producer stuff, making Bill Berry play every drum part 50 times. When they came back to work with us on 'Pilgrimage', I could tell that Bill's confidence had been shaken.

I'm sure that Stephen felt like his job was to "clean up these boys" so they can go to the top. Whereas Don and I were a lot more cavalier in our attitude toward working on this stuff. We were going to make records that we liked. Fortunately, the band was very headstrong and prevailed, and Don Dixon and I ended up doing *Murmur*. And, of course, I'm proud to say that *Murmur* is the *Dark Side Of The Moon* of the new-wave era.

> "I'M SO GLAD I GOT TO WORK ON SOME STUFF THAT PEOPLE CARED ABOUT. THEY'RE ONE OF THE BIGGEST BANDS OF ALL TIME, AND I GOT TO BE THERE."

**In regard to Peter's playing, it's hard to pick a quintessential track from that time, but I've always loved his arpeggios and little lead lines in 'Wolves, Lower'. Did he have all that worked out?**

Oh yeah. If you've ever tried to play that song, it's pretty fast and you have to try not to miss any of the notes. When they came up with that song, I thought, Wow, these guys have gotten better. Peter could just play like that. He could arpeggio the shit out of stuff and not miss a note. Not since Hilton Valentine [The Animals' original guitarist] have I heard anybody as perfect at playing arpeggios for four minutes straight without missing a note.

**They rocked harder on *Reckoning*. 'Harborcoat', 'Pretty Persuasion', 'Second Guessing' – those are blazing tracks.**

I think it just happened. They were always rocking live. When you see footage of them playing pre-*Murmur*, they're like a punk band. When they made *Murmur*, they weren't being contrary, but I think they were aware of the clichés they could become, and they didn't want to do that. I think that they thought, Okay, we love all this punk, but we're going to make a record that is thoughtful, textured and interesting. But that took a little work to remind them that they had that instinct, because the Stephen Hague thing had freaked them out about anything that you might do in the studio. They were prepared to make this live-in-the-studio thing with those songs, which was really going to undersell them. By the time they did *Reckoning*, their lives were moving faster, and so they just went with it for a while. Not totally, but a little.

**On 'So. Central Rain (I'm Sorry)', they sound very comfortable in putting their feet close to the line of being commercial.**

Right. They were semi-highfalutin, but they were highfalutin in a correct way. They had some standards, but they weren't weird purists. They weren't unrealistic. If they got on the radio, that was okay with them, but I don't think they catered to it. They were very easy for me to relate to because I had the same aesthetics. I don't hate commercial music at all.

They wanted to check out the universe of playing in a band and doing all the stuff you can do. They just didn't want to be stupid or clichéd about it, although no doubt, they had times where they acted exactly like Mötley Crüe or something. They weren't too pure to do some of the rock stuff, and they weren't too pure to consider having hits, but they weren't going to pander to that either.

**Was Peter experimenting with different guitars on *Reckoning*?**

He had his own Rickenbacker 12-string at that point. On *Reckoning*, you hear that, but you also still hear my Fender 12. Of course, the dark secret of *Reckoning* is that we also used a Scholz Rockman. I love those things. They were a total joke to some people, but I thought the Rockman was very useful in the R.E.M. sonic palette of the day. When you hear that record, you're hearing amps and a bit of Rockman.

**We must certainly talk about the MVP of R.E.M. – Mike Mills. His athletic bass playing was crucial to the brilliance of those songs.**

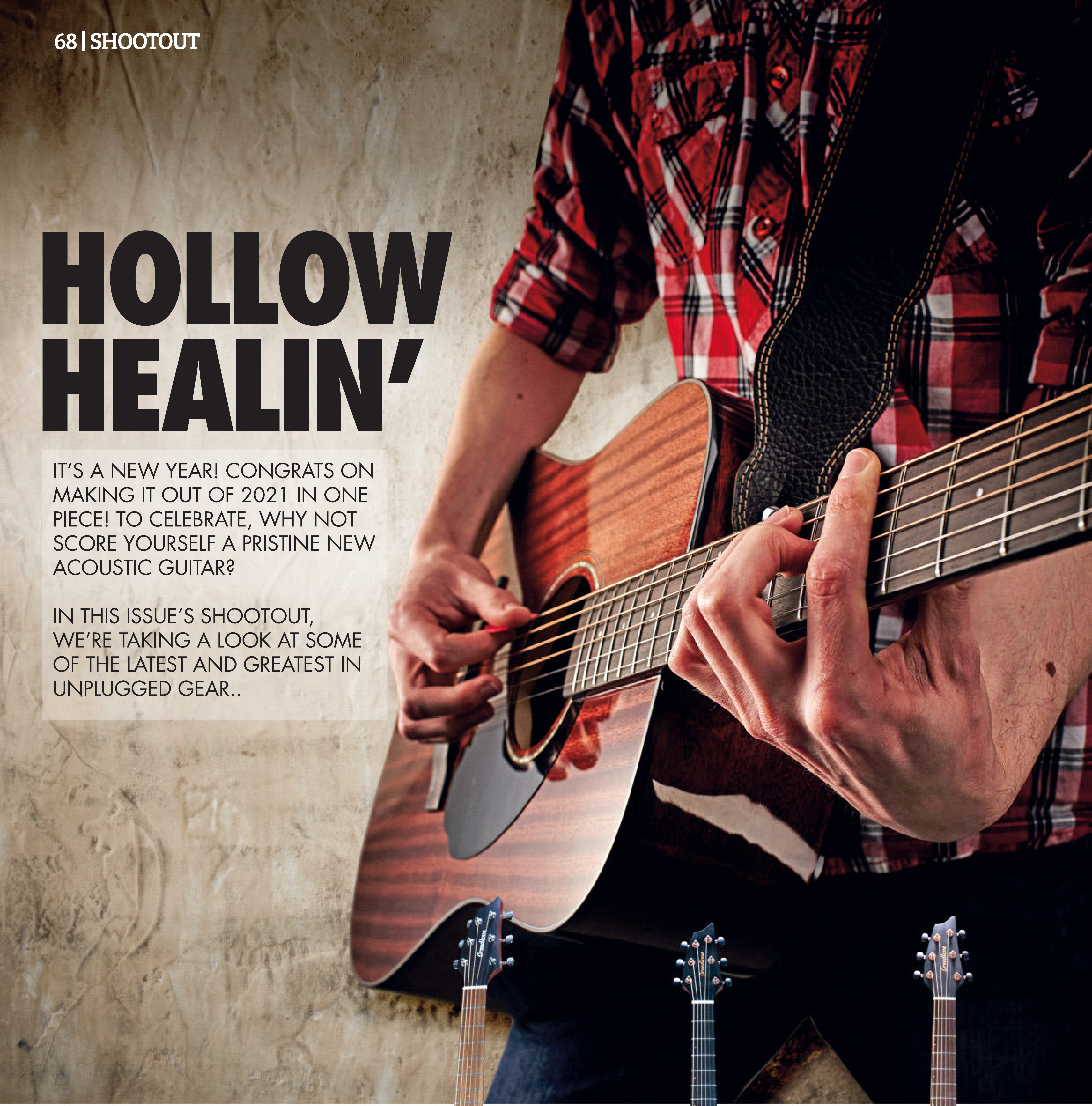
That's right. Mike's great. He's super strong and solid. Back then, he played with a pick, which I loved. It was so good for their kind of aggression. The band had a real forward movement about them, matched with Bill Berry's drumming.

**Because Mike didn't just stick to root notes, he could fill in the sound a great deal.**

Oh, absolutely. He and Peter really complemented each other. There was always a counterpoint thing that was really great. The lead up to the chorus on 'Radio Free Europe', there's that ascending bassline – it's really catchy. Mike certainly knew how to play. The stuff he did was really good. It was very important to the total thing.

**You've always been very gracious about the fact they went on to record with other producers. No sour grapes at all?**

Well, that's just because I'm nice as hell [*laughs*]. But seriously, I'm so glad I got to work on some stuff that people cared about. They're one of the biggest bands of all time, and I got to be there. I had some influence on them for a while, and it was fun. I just felt it was great that all of us were getting to do the thing.



# HOLLOW HEALIN'

IT'S A NEW YEAR! CONGRATS ON MAKING IT OUT OF 2021 IN ONE PIECE! TO CELEBRATE, WHY NOT SCORE YOURSELF A PRISTINE NEW ACOUSTIC GUITAR?

IN THIS ISSUE'S SHOOTOUT, WE'RE TAKING A LOOK AT SOME OF THE LATEST AND GREATEST IN UNPLUGGED GEAR..

## BREEDLOVE

### Eco Collection

**BREEDLOVE** is turning over a new leaf by eliminating the use of clear-cut wood in its 2021 model line. And with the company's new Eco Collection, players of all piggy-bank sizes can own a solid-top guitar with EcoTonewood back and sides. EcoTonewood technology is a new lamination process designed to integrate three layers in such a way as to avoid the tone-dampening, soft center-core of standard laminates. Breedlove sandwiches sturdy African mahogany into the 17 guitars of the Eco Collection, which range from the most affordable Discovery S line to four mid-level Rainforest S models to the top-tier Pursuit Exotic S series.

## CORT
### Gold-Edge

**THE CUT CRAFT**, Cort's Limited Edition 2020 NAMM Show special, had wonderfully smooth beveled edges, and apparently I'm not the only one who loved the way it looked and played. The guitar was such a hit that Cort has implemented bevel-cut design elements into its top-of-the-line Gold series and created the new Gold-Edge. Its grand auditorium cutaway body features a triple-bevel-cut system for ultimate ergonomics and playability, along with L.R. Baggs' first-class Anthem electronics to make it super stage-worthy.

## EPIPHONE
### Slash J-45

**SLASH MAY BE** one of hard rock's most influential electric players, but he's also made an impact with his acoustic side. Hot on the heels of his upscale signature Gibson Collection comes the more affordable Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Collection, featuring the Slash J-45. It has all solid woods, Sitka on top of mahogany, an L.R. Baggs VTC preamp, and Slash's "Skully" signature drawing on the back of the headstock, truss-rod cover and hard-shell case. The guitar is available in Vermillion Burst and November Burst.

## GIBSON
### Tom Petty SJ-200 Wildflower

**OF ALL THE** exciting Artist Series announcements from the Gibson Acoustic Custom Shop, the limited, signature-edition inspired by the Southern Jumbo made for Tom Petty circa 1996 while he was writing and recording Wildflowers is especially interesting. This Wildflower features top-shelf woods and hardware, as well as personal touches, like Petty's signature engraved on the double pickguard. Daughter Adria Petty says, "It is so incredible to see the SJ-200 design our dad worked on so long ago lovingly brought to fruition. It is an honor to have Gibson launch this instrument so that others can make what my dad called 'the big jangle.'"

## MARTIN
### Grand K-16E 12-String

**AFTER ALL OUR** 12-string coverage last year, we were excited when the new Martin Grand J-16E 12-string showed up at our door. The nice neck taper feels fine in hand, while the model's wide, yet thin body makes it sit comfortably against one's own body, and provides a nice tonal balance. The J-16E is made of the tried-and-true combination of East Indian rosewood back and sides with a Sitka spruce top, and is performance ready, with a Fishman Matrix VT Enhance NT2 pickup system stealthily tucked away in the sound hole.

## FENDER
### California Mini Series

**TIGHT BODIES** with full-figured tone – that's the California dream Fender presents in the form of two new Minis: the Redondo and the Sonoran. The six-in-line Strat-style headstock delivers a distinctly Fender look, while other common features include a travel-friendly body, walnut fretboard and bridge, Nubone nut and saddle, mahogany back and sides and a spruce top with a satin finish. The Sonoran has a three-quarter-sized body with an exclusive shape and a 23.3-inch scale length. The Redondo is a half-size guitar with a 22-and-three-quarter-inch scale. The Redondo is offered in natural and sunburst finishes, while the Sonoran comes in natural and all mahogany.

## GIBSON

### Generation Collection

**GIBSON'S NEW GENERATION** Collection puts four great models within reach of students and other players on a budget. Best of all, these are hand-made Gibsons from the newly expanded acoustic dream factory in Bozeman, Montana, where they are crafted by the same luthiers who make all of Gibson's unplugged offerings.

The models include the G-00, G-45, G-Writer EC and G-200 EC. Common to each guitar is the Gibson Player Port, a player-facing sound hole designed to let guitarists hear the instrument as the audience does, resulting in a more immersive sonic experience. The concept, which dates back to the early '60s, has been refined to deliver a fresh dimension to the time-honoured Gibson acoustic sound.

All Generation Collection guitars have walnut back and sides, a Sitka spruce top with natural finish and a striped ebony fretboard with a flatter radius. Other features include Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners, a Tusq nut and saddle for exceptional tuning stability, and a utile neck with a slim, comfortable profile for easy playability. Each guitar comes with a gig bag. Individual models are listed in order from smallest to largest body style.

## GUILD

### Marley A-20

**BOB MARLEY WROTE** many of his hits on a Guild Madeira, and the guitar maker's new A-20 acoustic pays homage to the reggae master's classic dreadnought. The Marley A-20 has mahogany back and sides with a solid-spruce top, and unique features include a vintage-correct headstock with script logo, custom signature pickguard and a script "Marley" inlay on fret 12.

The guitar comes with a booklet that offers insights on Marley's original guitar, details about the A-20, a chord chart for his classic cut "Three Little Birds," three custom picks and a poster. That's a lot of cheese for a little cheddar. Plus, Guild has partnered with the global reforestation charity One Tree Planted to plant a tree for every Marley guitar made.

## SANTA CRUZ
### Happy Traum Signature HT/13

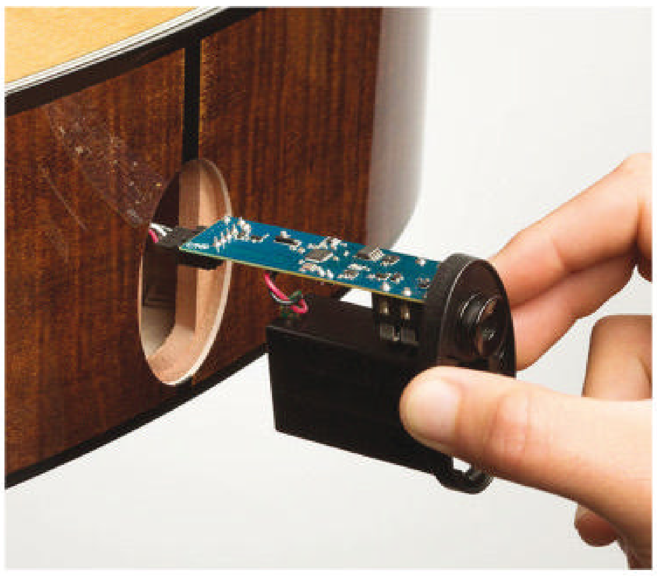
**A NEW SIGNATURE** model from Santa Cruz has become as rare as a summer with breathable air in California. And when the signature name is Happy Traum, that's especially good news. The formative Frets contributor, renowned educator and esteemed player worked closely with Santa Cruz guru Richard Hoover on this impeccable H-13 fingerpicker. A review unit recently arrived, and it's simply one of the most amazing acoustics I've ever picked up.

## LUXE BY MARTIN
### Contour Pick

**MARTIN'S NEW LUXURY** guitar pick is made of a tough polymer with a satin surface designed to last a long time and offer low-friction action. The asymmetrical triangular shape features uniquely contoured bevels so you can home in on a particular attack by getting the angle of a particular edge just right, or flip to either of the other two for different approaches. It's 1mm thick and an included Grip Enhancement disc can be attached for players that prefer a tighter hold. Luxe comes in a nice carrying case that makes for a gift-worthy presentation.

## GODIN
### Acoustic Solutions ASG-8 120

**OUR NORTHERN NEIGHBOURS** at Godin have re-imagined their Acoustic Solutions amps and the new dual-channel, 120-watt ASG-8 epitomises the modern troubadour companion. Compared to heritage models it's more compact, sits at a better angle, has re-engineered effects and more modern features such as Bluetooth connectivity. Godin designed the amp to sound good for wind instruments and violins as well, and so that "electric guitar players can use it with their amp modellers and Impulse Response units to get a full range sound."



## TAYLORSENSE
### Guitar Health Monitoring System

**TAYLOR'S NEWEST INNOVATION** took top honours at Summer NAMM's Best In Show awards in the Best Add-On or Accessory category. The TaylorSense guitar health monitoring system is a smart battery box plus mobile app that helps players keep their Taylor guitars safe and sound by monitoring and sending alerts via Bluetooth about potentially harmful humidity levels, extreme temperatures, low battery and even damage due to physical impacts. TaylorSense replaces any current Taylor nine-volt battery box, and its sensors send health data to the app that delivers push notifications and "how to fix" videos. Talk about high-tech acoustic!

## D'ADDARIO
### XS Acoustic Strings

**ACOUSTIC STRING INNOVATIONS** don't come along often, which makes D'Addario's new XS Acoustic Strings all the more noteworthy. The XS line incorporates D'Addario's proprietary manufacturing processes and well-known innovations – like NY Steel high-carbon cores in the wound strings and Fusion Twist technology in the plain steels – to give XS incomparable break strength and tuning stability.

But what sets XS Strings apart is their impossibly thin coating. Just one-tenth the thickness of human hair, it protects the strings from corrosion with noticeably less dampening, compared to coated competitors. XS may just convert holdouts about the performance of extended-life strings.

# PICK 'N' MIX

THE MATCHED PICKUP 'SET' IS *SO* LAST YEAR, RECKONS **DAVE BURRLUCK**, WHO SUGGESTS A PICKUP MISMATCH IS THE NEW BLACK…

Combining a Gibson humbucker with a Fender single coil – a benchmark mod-favourite – has certainly produced some stellar sounds, be it in the hands of Keith Richards or Andy Summers just for starters. Then there's the allure of Fender's neck humbucking/bridge single-coil Telecaster Custom. These are all invariably unbalanced pairings and it's that mismatch that interests us here. While the matched pickup set still rules, actually mixing up the styles and different brands can be rather inspiring, especially to the many of us who have been stuck recording these past months – anything that kicks a new riff, lick or song is very welcome.

In recent years we've definitely seen an expansion of pickup styles that are available to us beyond the de facto humbucker and single coils. As a consequence, numerous guitar makers have been mixing it up for some time. A very common setup, for example, is pairing a standard-sized bridge humbucker with a single-coil P-90 soapbar at the neck. You'll commonly find that setup on numerous boutique builds, but also on much more affordable instruments such as Gretsch's lowly G2215-P90 Streamliner Junior Jet Club, which pairs a Broad'Tron BT-2S at the bridge with a soapbar P-90 at the neck. Nik Huber's Piet – which has featured heavily in these pages over the past few months – uses a Telecaster-style neck single coil and a P-90 soapbar in a very funky, almost Gold Foil-like cover. And judging by our email inbox, there are plenty of DIYers posing the question, "What if…?"

Researching a couple of songs recently, I stumbled across Daniel Lanois playing his 1953 Les Paul Goldtop to which, if I understand correctly, he'd added a Bigsby and an early 60s Firebird pickup at the bridge. Now, irreversibly modding a vintage guitar is not usually the sort of thing we'd recommend, but probably inspired by fellow Canadian Neil Young whose 'Old Black' features a similar P-90/Firebird setup, this mismatch in the hands of Messers Young and Lanois has created some pretty inspirational songs and recordings. It's so wrong, but it sounds so right. And while the P-90 couldn't be closer to my heart, that Firebird pickup is one I've only ever played in situ. Clearly, I have some catching up to do.

While I'm right out of 1953 Les Pauls, I decide that having a guitar with individual pickup volume and tone controls is a must for a mismatch experiment like this. It means we can treat each disparate pickup to its own circuit when switched independently. That could mean different pot values, independent treble bleeds (or not), not to mention tone cap types and values and whether we want to go 'vintage' or 'modern' with our wiring.

A quick request to Guild resulted in a loaner Aristocrat P90, which I'd been rather impressed with when I got my hands on it in 2020: dual soapbar P-90s and four controls, plus a pretty lightweight chambered construction. The caveat, however, is the word 'loaner'. That means they'll want it back in the same condition it was lent to us, so unlike Daniel and Neil we're going to have to make our mods completely reversible.

## BRAND AWARENESS

Not only is my knowledge and experience of Firebird pickups scant, I honestly have no idea where to start, aside from following Dan and Neil's style: an 'early 60s' pickup. I don't fancy the cost – or risk – of trying to buy an original. In terms of new versions, however, I was surprised

**Oil City's Winterizer, unpotted and with four-conductor wiring**

**This mounting ring for the Winterizer means the pickup can be suspended like a standard humbucker**

**The Guild's dual volume and tone controls mean we can treat each pickup to its own circuit**

**With the Guild's bridge pickup cover removed, you'll see it's not a standard P-90 style**

by the choice available. And with great respect to the slew of tasty offerings from the world's makers, I decide the least I can do in these times is to buy British, and I decide to try my local pickup maker, Oil City Pickups, based just across the river in Leyton. I call up Ash Scott-Lockyer and about an hour later, having learned more than I can remember about the ins and outs of the mini-humbucker, especially the Firebird's, I order up a Winterizer bridge (named after Johnny, of course, who was certainly a major standard-bearer for the Firebird). If the pickup is a fraction as enjoyable as our chat, I'm going to be a happy punter.

My only deviation from that 'early '60s' spec is to go for four-conduction wiring. It's not that I plan to split the pickup or anything like that, it's simply that if it's out of phase with whatever neck pickup I end up using, I can quickly cure that by swapping two leads. Phase is one of those rather convoluted principles that I don't have space to go into here, but if you're combining different styles and brands then having one pickup with four-conductor wiring simply gives you a choice of whether you want to be in or out of phase with both pickups on. This is particularly helpful on a dual-volume guitar where you can lessen the effect – that overly thin and nasal sound – by simply backing off one of the volume controls.

## THE INSTALLATION

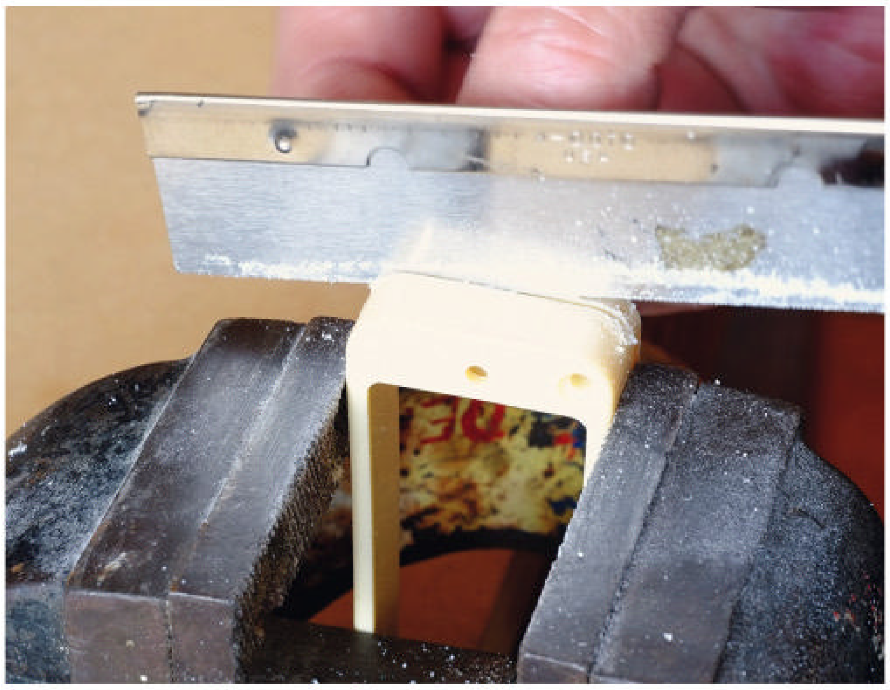
If you've ever uninstalled a Les Paul Deluxe's mini-humbucker, you'll know it has a pretty unique attachment that requires fitting a mounting plate into the cavity. Hmm. Typically, because of the way it installs, a Deluxe's mini-humbucker doesn't have a thread in the holes in its legs. A Firebird style does and was originally mounted to a narrower pickup ring. Now, I'm hoping I'm going to like my mismatch experiment, but if I don't, I want to be able to sell the Firebird pickup on in unmolested condition. I pick up the phone again to Ash and he has an answer straight away: a set of Vanson mini-humbucker rings that mount within the P-90 cavity via two diagonally placed corner screws, meaning I can suspend the pickup in the usual humbucking fashion. Game on.

It's all too easy to let a simple pickup swap turn into a much bigger modding project, especially as I completely forgot that the Aristocrat comes with gold hardware and my new Firebird purchase is in gleaming nickel – a mismatch in more than sound! But before I consider how to 'fix' that, I want to hear what the Firebird style has to offer and decide to wire it in, keeping the Franz soapbar in place at the neck and the original pots and switches. I do a few passes of both the original pickup mix position and the bridge on a song I'm working on then get to work.

## SCHOOLBOY ERROR

P-90 soapbars are a standard size, right? Wrong. Guild calls 'em P-90s, but they're shorter across the pickup by about 5mm, which means my standard-sized surround won't fit. D'oh! With some measuring and quite a bit of swearing I realise that by cutting the end walls to the correct height, the pickup cover will sit in the small rout and I should be able to mount the pickup. At worst, I'll have ruined a perfectly good pickup ring. In an ideal world a couple of small wood blocks glued into the end of the pickup cavity would help, but I find some long thin screws (like those used for mounting a traditional P-90-style soapbar), and mark and drill two holes to mount the slightly cut-off ring with the Winterizer suspended in the standard fashion with its springs and screws – the latter of which are a little long so you'll need to cut them.

Cutting the mounting ring walls so the oversized ring will sit over the pickup rout



Cutting the depth of the pickup ring

## FINALLY

Typically, we listen and evaluate the pickup set as a whole and adjust the pickup heights so the graduation from neck through mix to bridge is balanced; that's why bridge pickups usually have a little more output. Here, though, we're using one guitar to host two purposely different sounds, which takes me back a little because – no surprise, Sherlock! – they really are different. While the Guild's P-90 is a perfectly good pickup on a £700 guitar and certainly captures a bright and a little gritty tone, the Oil City Winterizer is on an elevated level. Obviously, it's bright, but there's a smooth almost lap-steel sort of tonality here that rounds off any ice-pick and is simply glorious with cleaner Fender or Vox AC30-type amps.

Generous delays and reverbs just enhance the ethereal voice while the neck P-90, with the volume pulled back and strummed with your thumb, Lanois-style, creates a moodier, softer rhythm voice. Does it do Mr Young? Wind up your amps, add some gnarly boost and it sounds – literally – like something's going to break yet still that steely, penetrating voice of the unpotted Winterizer cuts through. Don't be afraid to roll back the volume or tone to subtly soften the voice. And, as its name suggests, it's a near-perfect slide guitar voice that's pedal-steel like with volume swells and cleaner tones or vicious and visceral with some dirt.

The mini-humbucker isn't usually a first modding choice. Historically, many players have taken them out and got a tech to rout out a cavity for a full-size humbucker. But there's something quite delicious about this small aperture design that bridges the gap between the tougher and rougher P-90 and the classic PAF. Looking for a something a little different? Try one.

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The Tone City Golden Plexi can help you get the classic plexi style tone easily. The dynamics is like a real tube amplifier. When you play fast, you can still distinguish the sound of each string and with good clean up. When it is set at low gain, the sound will not be obscure but still clear. That is the big difference from other distortion pedals. Due to revised circuit design for several times, the noise is controlled at a very low level.

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Primal Scream's 1991 breakthrough album *Screamadelica* featured a fresh blend of indie-rock songwriting and acid house inspired production, propelling the Scottish rock 'n' roll band to international stardom. The limited edition Screamadelica 30th Anniversary Stratocaster commemorates this pivotal recording with a one of kind all-over graphic of the stunning red, yellow and blue album art – including matching pickguard, pickup covers and knobs. Features include a Modern "C"-shaped maple neck with 9.5-inch radius pau ferro fingerboard and medium jumbo frets, vintage-voiced alnico V single-coil pickups, and a two-point synchronised tremolo.

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The Cort AF30 provides 30 watts of clean solid-state power as well as onboard DSP for lush chorus, delay and chorus-delay effects. The AF Series amps also feature a four-band graphic EQ for further tone-shaping as well as a notch filter to eliminate feedback – a feature normally found in amps that cost much more. Ideal for small venues, rehearsals and practice applications, the mobile but powerful AF30 will extend the range of your acoustic-electric guitar with performance, features, value and musicality.

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**RRP: $1,250 • cmcmusic.com.au**

Markbass' Little Mark IV amp adds a range of extra features to those of their flagship Little Mark III head, which has become the industry standard for tone, portability and value. The Little Mark IV 300 is the 300-watt version of the LM IV head – a smart choice for those who don't need the full 500 watts. The new features include updated EQ, a new bi-band limiter – which responds faster and more dynamically to dynamic input than traditional limiters, and lets your high end "breathe" for a more natural sound – a handy mute switch, and a three-way rotary EQ switch.

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Faith's Venus is the now iconic shape that brought Faith Guitars to the consciousness of many players over the years. The combination of a 15-inch lower bout and a slimmer depth of body looks to classic OM or Auditorium body-shapes for inspiration, and makes the Venus the perfect compromise. The Venus Eclipse is fitted with the refined, low-profile Fishman INK3 preamp system with the Sonicore piezo pickup located under the saddle. The preamp features a chromatic tuner, three-band EQ and volume control. The output jack is located at the base of the guitar as part of the ingenious, easy-access battery compartment.

## EARTHQUAKER DEVICES HIZUMITAS

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The Hizumitas was designed for the one and only guitar sorceress, Wata, from the legendary band Boris! We could not be more excited to have the honor of working with such an iconic legend known for her crushing riffs and mind-melting leads. The Hizumitas is a faithful sonic recreation of her go-to distortion which has been a staple of her tone for many years: the Elk BM Sustainar.

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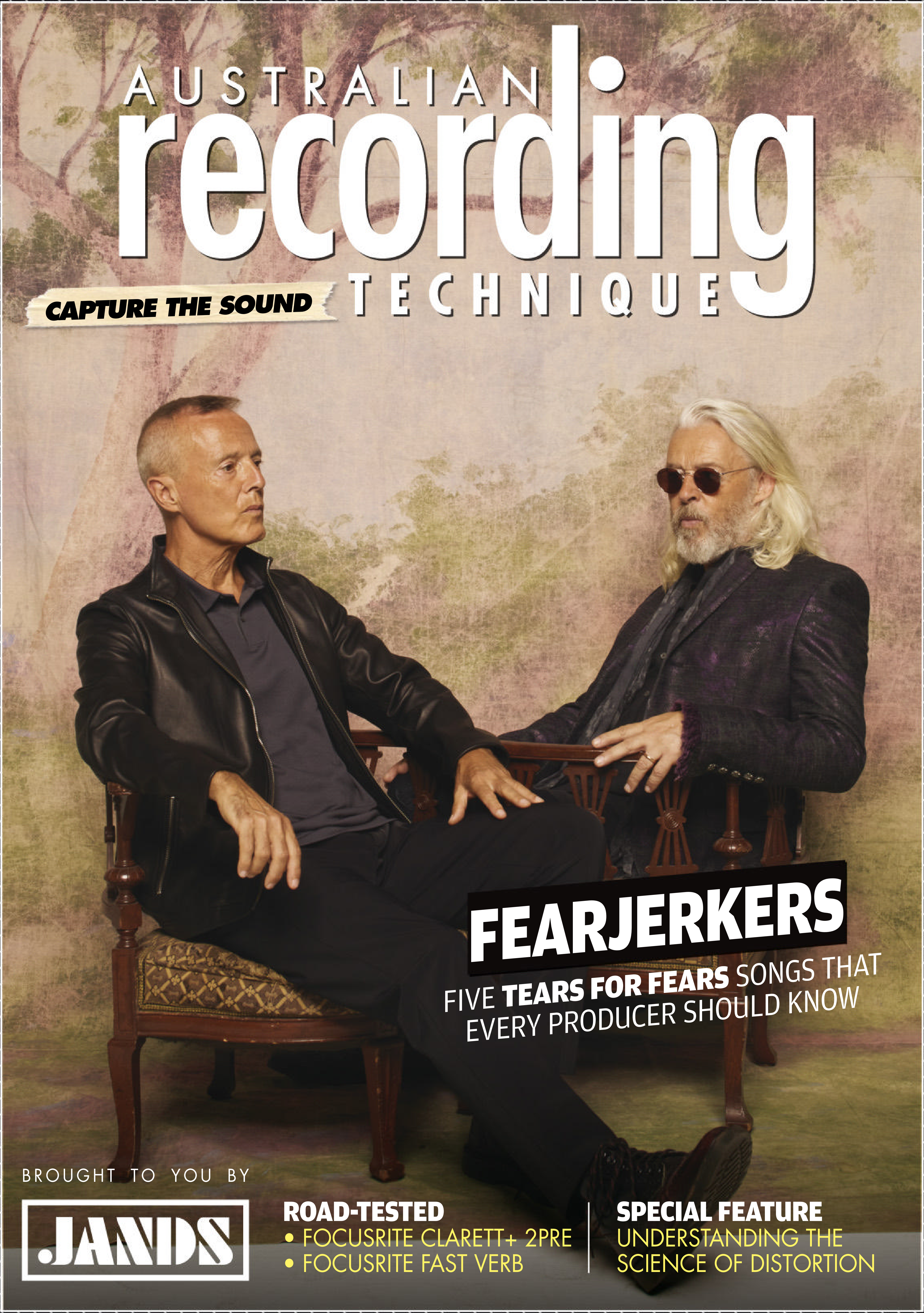

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# SONIC DESTRUCTION

FROM HARD CLIPPING TO REDUCED BITRATES, THERE'S PLENTY OF CREATIVITY TO BE FOUND BY DOING THINGS JUST A LITTLE BIT WRONG. HERE, WE EXPLORE THE SCIENCE OF DISTORTION AND HOW TO USE IT.

Right back since the earliest days of recorded music, musicians and producers have been making use of techniques that are technically 'wrong' for creative purposes. Just look at the adventurous techniques used by The Beatles in Abbey Road, or the left-field sound creation of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. In the 21st century, there are multiple techniques and production approaches used regularly by electronic music makers which originated as things that were technically 'wrong' - errors, malfunctions or misused gear that turned out to create musically pleasing results.

The most obvious example is distortion, which is essentially the byproduct of trying to push a piece of recording gear harder than intended. There are multiple other 'wrong' techniques worth adding to your arsenal of production skills though; from glitch-like digital pseudo-malfunctions to purposefully raw and lo-fi recording techniques.

## WHAT IS DISTORTION?

Distortion, in a music production context, is derived from the non-linear behaviour of classic recording gear - the way analogue circuits respond differently depending on the amplitude of the audio signal passed through them. While recording gear is generally designed to be as close to linear as possible within the normal range of operation, push any analogue circuit harder than intended and it will begin to alter the shape of the waveform.

The most extreme example of this is what's known as hard clipping, where a device with a hard limit on the amplitude of a waveform - such as an analogue to digital converter - effectively lops off the top of the waveform, turning a sine wave into a square. Hard clipping can sound harsh and abrasive, but most analogue devices - and plugins that emulate them - have a softer and more subtle response. This results in a more gradual harmonic distortion that increases as you raise the level of the input signal, resulting in pleasing new harmonics and a slow rolling off of high frequencies. It's this effect, used with a light touch, that's responsible for much of what we know as 'analogue warmth'.

In the early days of recording technology, distortion was often seen as an unwanted side effect of misused gear or recordings made at the wrong level. As the decades have gone on though, it's increasingly been viewed as an important creative effect. In the digital realm, for one thing, the floating point maths used by modern DAWs - resulting in vast amounts of potential headroom - means that tracks can end up feeling cold and 'digital' due to an absolute lack of natural distortion.

Creatively, distortion can do very interesting things to sounds that can change depending on the type of source material used. A distortion effect won't sound identical on all sources; due to the way distortion creates new harmonic content, the results can vary depending not only on the level of the audio used, but the pitch and complexity. Guitarists have long made use of this. A three note chord - comprised of the root, perfect fifth and octave above the root note - doesn't sound like much played 'clean' but a healthy dose of distortion and the result is the familiar, rich 'power chord' sound.

This is the result of intermodulation, which is what happens when we distort two or more waveforms at once. In the case of straightforward harmonic distortion - applying distortion to a single waveform - new harmonic series partials are added above the frequency of the original waveform. When you distort multiple waveforms together, new partials are then added at the sum and difference frequencies of the two original waves. This means that the results can sound grittier and less musical - depending on the frequency of the original waves - and that the process can result in new frequency content added below the original waves.

This can be desirable, such as adding heft to a simple guitar chord, but can also cause mix problems further down the line; when applying distortion across a group of sounds or complex chord, it's often worth applying a filter after the effect to roll off unwanted frequencies.

Classic analogue approaches to distortion can impart other qualities to the sound too. For example, tube (or valve) devices tend to alter the dynamics of a sound as well as the frequency content; they exhibit a subtle 'memory' behaviour, whereby the circuit responds based on what's just happened previously. The result is a subtle compression and taming of transients.

Valve distortion devices - common to classic guitar amps, among other things - also create asymmetrical distortion. Asymmetry, when talking about distortion, means that the positive side of a waveform isn't affected in the same manner as the negative. Some waveshapes, such as square or triangle waves, are symmetrical. These symmetrical waves feature only odd harmonics, and produce a sound that's often described as 'hollow'.

Processing a symmetrical wave through an asymmetrical distortion will create asymmetrical results, introducing even harmonics as found in saw or pulse waves. The audible effect is a 'sweeter' and richer distorted sound, compared to symmetrical distortion. Many modern plugins offer controls to adjust these characteristics, making virtual distortion sound more or less symmetrical. Another common control found on distortion effects is some form of 'colour' control, which usually amounts to an integrated EQ to adjust the frequency response of the effect, boosting or attenuating high or low frequencies.

Analogue-style distortion isn't the only game in town, though. Distortion comes in numerous guises. With stompboxes and analogue gear, you often hear of effects referred to as saturation, overdrive or fuzz, which are variations of the same thing.

Saturation is subtle distortion, pushed lightly to create a pleasing, almost 'hi-fi' effect. Overdrive is the sound of a valve circuit pushed at its upper limits, while fuzz is a transistor-based effect, creating a distortion tone more focused on the higher frequencies. In modern production gear, however, it's common to find several forms of distortion effect that deviate from the classic analogue-style processes. Let's look at some...

### Bitcrushing

This is a purely digital form of sound degradation. It involves decreasing the accuracy of a digital audio file by decreasing bit depth (and/or sampling rate). This gives a simplified digital sound, which can sound crunchy, lo-fi and distorted in a distinctly digital way.

### Wavefolding

Wavefolding works by inverting the 'peaks' of a waveform. Like hard clipping, this has the result of flattening a waveform over a certain threshold, although here the peaks are folded back in on themselves to create a new, more complex waveshape.

### Frequency modulation

Generally a form of synthesis, but, depending on the frequencies and waves involved, it can make distortion-like tones too. The most obvious form comes when using a noise oscillator as a source to modulate the pitch of another oscillator or the cutoff frequency of a filter.

## THREE DISTORTION POWER TIPS

### 1. Cut the chord

Distorting full chords can create unpleasant tones due to intermodulation. Try distorting each note of a chord separately - duplicate your part so that each note has its own track and apply separate distortion effects to each. The results will sound very different - and potentially more musical - than distorting the whole.

### 2. Break the chain

Distortion can be heavily altered by placing other effects before or after it in a chain. A distortion after reverb can sound great, for example, for creating squashed, gritty reverb tails for shoegaze-style effects. A modulated filter before a distortion can have an interesting impact on how the effect responds, particularly with resonance. A compressor before a distortion plugin gives a more consistent tone; after, it helps to shape the resulting signal.

### 3. Modulate your parameters

Try automating or modulating distortion parameters in order to keep the sound fresh throughout a track. Evolving the tonal colour, symmetry or level of the effect can also be a great way to add movement.

# NO TIME FOR TEARS

FROM NEW-WAVE SYNTH PRODDING TO FULL ON ROCK PROGGING, WE PICK FIVE HITS BY **TEARS FOR FEARS** THAT EVERY PRODUCER WORTH THEIR ROLAND JUPITER-8 SHOULD LISTEN TO.

WORDS BY **DANIEL GRIFFITHS**.

Tears for Fears have always been a bit of a quandary. While it was easy and convenient to package them up as a 'synth band' at their dawning – a (new) wave they had no problem surfing – they are actually something else entirely. And we're not sure if even they know what.

Bands tend to come to synthtown by one of two routes. They're either A) Utopian Brave New World-ers, mesmerised by the Kraftwerk stance and eager for similar escape. Or B) Grabbers of a flailing synthy lifeline as an escape route out of the uncool maelstrom mess of prog rock.

Human League and Heaven 17? Utopians. Barely able to play a note but crafting all-new magical noise precisely because of that. Howard Jones, Nik Kershaw, and Tears For Fears? Proggers to a man. Shamefully aware that their 'widdly widdly clever music' was increasingly dooming them to beardy non-recognition, but also aware that popping some bloops on the top and sacking the drummer might – might – just get them a hit... And then there were the haircuts. And that dancing.

But let's not dwell in painful reminiscence on their debut and instead remember that Tears For Fears' core of Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith went on to ace the '80s and with the upcoming release of their *Tipping Point* album, are perhaps in better shape now than ever.

So, join us as we romp through a landscape of global smash hits that has seen reinvention, regret and reunion in equal measures and pick our favourite five.

## 1. 'MEMORIES FADE'

Okay, odds are you're familiar with Tears For Fears' 1983 number one smash-hit debut album, *The Hurting*. It's home to a slew of modern classics that we implore you to revisit. Title track 'The Hurting', 'Mad World', 'Pale Shelter', 'Change', 'Suffer The Children' and 'Start Of The Breakdown' – all are brilliant. That's why our pick from their debut album is 'Memories Fade' – the one track that flawlessly dodges all the angsty naivety that's dripping all over the rest of the album.

The guitars of 'The Hurting'? Barely there. Are they not plugged in properly? Why so thin? And the bass? Plodding, ponderous and often not-even-there-at-all. The Human League and Soft Cell featured booming backing and bottom ends that covered off funky, robotic and everything in between, so how come both Tears For Fears' bass and guitar faders seemed to get a downward nudge every time they left the control room? Could it be that producer Chris Hughes (ex-drummer with Adam And The Ants, aka Merrick) preferred to edge up the beats instead?

Non-single 'Memories Fade' bucks the weedy trend with great keyboard work, a bassline you can hear and feel, and drums that fail to dominate.

## 2. 'SHOUT'

This global smash is an obvious pick, but it's impossible not to explore. 'Shout' was born during a month of writing sessions by a solo Orzabal at his home in Bath. Seeking inspiration, he'd programmed up a copycat beat from Talking Heads' 'Seen And Not Seen' (from their classic *Remain In Light* album) on his LinnDrum, and teamed this with an "ominous" bass sound on his Prophet-5 synth. Soon he took to chanting along with his new creation. But, after nailing the chorus in minutes, it took months for the song to be realised in full.

Orzabal reluctantly played it to visiting Tears For Fears keyboardist Ian Stanley as an afterthought, to show what he'd been up to, and it was Stanley who saw the appeal. "This is going to be a worldwide smash," he told Orzabal, giving him all the encouragement he needed to turn his unfinished "looping mantra" into an actual track.

Tears For Fears were big fans of the LinnDrum, and it's that machine that provides the core beat of 'Shout' – triangle, rimshot, shakers. However, the distinctive tom and snare sound used on the finished track come from another source. Fledgling company Digidesign first made its name selling EPROM chips for drum machines featuring new sounds that could "simply" be swapped out with the existing sound chips in your machine. Pop your drum machine's hood and you'd find a single chip per sound. Take out the snare chip, pop in another and you've got a whole new snare drum. Amazing...

Its most popular early creation was the Rock Drums chipset. This featured five EPROM chips containing a crunchy ringing metallic snare, a

cardboard box kick drum, deep bucket-y toms, clanging hi-hats, and a sharp crash all (it is has been alleged) sampled from the opening bars of Led Zeppelin's 'When The Levee Breaks' (but we couldn't possibly comment).

It *is* possible that Orzabal or producer Chris Hughes burned EPROMs for their Linn bearing the Digidesign sounds, but it's far more likely that they ran an E-MU Drumulator alongside the Linn as the original Digi chipset was sold in Drumulator-ready format. Digidesign would go on to even greater things, of course, not least inventing Pro Tools a few years later.

## 3. 'SOWING THE SEEDS OF LOVE'

No, *this* is the start of the breakdown. In interviews over the years, Smith has always stated that they're most at home in the studio, but it seems that the excesses of Seeds' recording process were a grind too far, as Orzabal's mounting perfectionism wore away at Smith's patience.

After the success of their second album, *Songs From The Big Chair*, and its global tour, the band took a well-earned three-year rest that Smith made the most of, by A) Being out enjoying himself like the global rock/pop superstar he was. And B) Getting divorced. Meanwhile it was Orzabal who was left to work, fret, record and re-record an in-trouble third album as costs spiralled, working increasingly with keyboardist Nicky Holland rather than the absent Smith. Holland co-wrote five of the album's eight tracks with Smith contributing to just this title track.

But what a track it is. A shameless Beatles pastiche, it's basically 'Hello Goodbye' with the trumpet from 'Penny Lane' and the trickery from 'Day In The Life'. The track's dazzling layers and switch-arounds means that it never outstays its 6:17 running time. Special nod to the Hot Chocolate You Sexy Thing break at 3:29.

It's the centrepiece of a complex and costly album that more often than not edges Smith out in favour of the newly discovered soul and gospel sounds of vocalist Oleta Adams, making it an at times difficult to reconcile sequel to *Songs From The Big Chair*. Its second track – the overlong 8:33 'Bad Man's Song' – basically (re) sets the Tears For Fears tone with only the excellent 'Advice For The Young At Heart' being a comfortable fit for existing fans.

The album would cost over £1m to produce, a sum that the band would have to recoup in royalties from sales before they earned a penny, adding further to the friction of its sessions. And there was one final straw on the horizon when – perhaps sensing the imminent financial collision the band were hurtling towards – their then manager Paul King was accused and subsequently convicted of impropriety with Tears For Fears' cash.

Orzabal and Smith had signed to King's (no joke) Outlaw Management at the start of their careers and he had seen the *Big Chair* money come rolling in. But by *Seeds*, with no new product, Outlaw were in trouble, with gaps in their accounting leading the company to fold in 1990, the year after the release of the album, and King being declared bankrupt and convicted of fraud and imprisoned for three and a half years soon after.

Throughout this ordeal Orzabal had wanted to drop King, but Smith had stuck by him, adding to a rift that in 1991 would lead to the band splitting. This despite Seeds being another hit, reaching number #1 in the UK and number #8 in the US. The story goes that in the final winding up of all things Tears For Fears, the band had two remaining assets to carve up. One was the name Tears For Fears (and the rights to continue recording and performing under that name) and the other was a powerful Audi Quattro sports car. Smith chose the car.

Orzabal continued as Tears For Fears, penning the Smith-dissing 'Fish Out Of Water' on first 'solo' Tears For Fears album *Elemental* (*"With your high-class friends you think you've got it made. The only thing you made was that tanned look on your face"*) and the King-slamming 'Cold' on its follow up *Raoul And The Kings Of Spain* (*"King got caught with his fingers in the till. Where's your calculator? Did you leave it in your will?"*). Ouch.

## 4. 'BROKEN'/'HEAD OVER HEELS'/'BROKEN (LIVE)'

In these days of bloated, overburdened, overdue album releases featuring as many as 18 tracks (and that's before the extra 12 courtesy of the 'Special Edition' a year later), Tears For Fears' brevity of content looks positively Ebineezerian by comparison.

Both *Big Chair* and its four-years-in-the-making sequel *Seeds* only feature eight tracks – a crime compounded further on *Chair* when you consider that one of them, 'Broken', actually appears twice. *And* the track had already appeared (as 'We Are Broken') on the B-side of 'Pale Shelter' from the album earlier. What a swizz...

Yes, it's time to partake of Big Chair's famous sandwich and tuck into the 'Broken'/'Head Over Heels'/'Broken (Live)' triple-tracker. The meat of the track is, of course, 'Head Over Heels', a new track that borrowed the chiming piano riff from the break of 'Broken'. Thus we get the bread of 'Broken', segueing into the filling of 'Head Over Heels', before returning to bottom layer 'Broken' again (albeit this time in inexplicably live form, recorded in December 1983 at London's Hammersmith Odeon in a performance subsequently released as part of Tears For Fears' *In My Mind's Eye* video in 1984). The result is a bit of a musical journey, therefore, which ends with a wholly unexpected round of mid-album cheering.

Worth pointing out that good old-fashioned vinyl, cassette, and CD forms manage the 'Broken' to 'Heels' transition as the band and producer intended, but modern streaming services have a spell-breaking click between the tracks. Tsk.

'Head Over Heels' was released as a single (sans 'Broken's) requiring a Dave Bascombe remix, reaching an impressive number #3 in the US' Top 100, and cementing their status at this point as officially "massive". Meanwhile it reached a decent #12 in the UK.

Just to add to the confusion, the 12-inch vinyl 'Preacher Mix' of the track *does* feature both ends of 'Broken' (along with new vocals, replacing the lyric and melody with Orzabal reading aloud the lyrics of album track and subsequent single 'I Believe' in the style of a preacher...) with the end portion of 'Broken' this time being the return of the studio recording rather than the album's live recording. Sigh.

Of course, 'Head Over Heels' went on to be brilliantly deployed in the movie Donnie Darko, in a scene especially created in order to use it – but it's the track's actual video that seals the deal for us, containing one of our favourite '80s video moments *ever*. Yes, we're talking about the part where Ian Stanley approaches the librarian's desk, she suddenly ducks below it and a ruddy great Roland Jupiter-8 *swings in* (you can just see the wires) upon which he then proceeds to bust out the track's blinding synth solo. *With one finger.* Funny how time flies...

## 5. 'CLOSEST THING TO HEAVEN'

Of course, 'Everybody Loves A Happy Ending', and what better title for the group's reunion album in 2004 – the first with Orzabal and Smith on board since Seeds in 1989. The album took four years to complete after personal loss in both camps prompted Orzabal and Smith to reach out and bury the hatchet in 2000. And the good news was that their previous triumphs and adversities melded to create an album that – for us – edges even the heady heights of *Seeds Of Love*.

'Closest Thing To Heaven' joins a rousing, confident, musically and lyrically strong opening set that might not be shot through with "pop" this time, but instead displays maturity and talent in spades, replacing the wanton experimentation and need to rewrite rules that's telegraphed heart-on-the-sleeve all the way through the likes of difficult 'middle albums' *Elemental* and *Raoul And The Kings Of Spain*.

Again, there are Beatles nods via the reverse reverbed tom rolls straight from the *Seeds Of Love*, but it's the great bass playing, effortless guitar-plus-piano and a shaker-driven drum groove that win our hearts... And yes, that is the (now sadly departed) actress Brittany Murphy in the video.

# Focusrite Clarett+ 2Pre

WANT TO UPSCALE YOUR INTERFACE? FOCUSRITE COULD HAVE JUST THE THING.

REVIEW BY **JON MUSGRAVE**.

**RRP: TBC**

Clarett is Focusrite's premium studio-grade USB interface range and with only three devices to choose from, offer a more focused product line than Focusrite's entry-level Scarlett. All three operate at up to 24-bit/192kHz, including MIDI I/O and additional connectivity via ADAT interface. They also have a decent bundle of software including Focusrite's Red 2 and Red 3 plugins and Plugin Alliance's bx_console Focusrite SC. Their recent update to Clarett+, as you might expect from an audiophile device, focuses on improving the performance rather than expanding that feature set.

The Clarett+ 2Pre we have for review is the smallest of the three and has two mic pres with front-mounted combination mic/line/instrument inputs with gain controls and individual self-illuminating phantom power switches. There's also an Air LED indicator for the optional ISA transformer input emulation. Next to these, you'll find the main Monitor output level and a single headphone output with level control.

Round the back is four balanced outputs on quarter-inch TRS jacks, MIDI I\O and the aforementioned ADAT optical input. This delivers a total I/O of ten-in/four-out and coupling the 2Pre with Focusrite's own Clarett OctoPre would deliver a pretty compelling ten-mic input Air enabled tracking setup.

Clarett+ 2Pre is a USB 2.0 compatible device and connection is via a USB-C port on the back. This supports USB-C bus powering, but you'll need a USB-C equipped device that provides 15W rather than 7.5W. If that's not an option you can use the included PSU and you'll find both USB-C and USB-A terminated cables in the box.

The 2Pre works in conjunction with the Focusrite Control software and some functionality including selecting the instrument input is only accessible via this software. This won't please everyone, but it's extremely easy to use and setting up your low latency monitoring is pretty self-explanatory. The software also provides some great extra features, including choosing which output pairs, if any, are actually controlled by the hardware Monitor knob. Rather usefully, Focusrite Control is also available as a slightly simplified iOS app, so you can control levels, including your low latency monitoring mix from your phone.

Clarett+ has new, improved independent A-D and D-A converters, slightly better noise figures throughout and improved dynamic range. It's tough to judge this without A/B ing the unit with the previous generation. Nevertheless, the mic inputs are silky smooth and have plenty of headroom, and the outputs are crystal clear and suitably noise-free.

If you want to add some life to your input, the Air option does just that, and although this is software controlled, you'll hear the welcoming sound of a relay switching the circuit inside the unit. Also excellent are the two JFET instrument inputs. These sound substantially better than a regular instrument input and clip in a nice fuzzy way if you push them hard.

Overall, the Clarett+ 2Pre is a reasonably simple interface with some very handy features, that offers subtle yet welcome improvements over its predecessor.

### VERDICT

The latest generation of these excellent interfaces delivers handy software control alongside rock-solid audio performance.

### PROS

- Crystal clear mic preamps with plenty of headroom.
- Air transformer input emulation.
- Useful JFET instrument inputs.

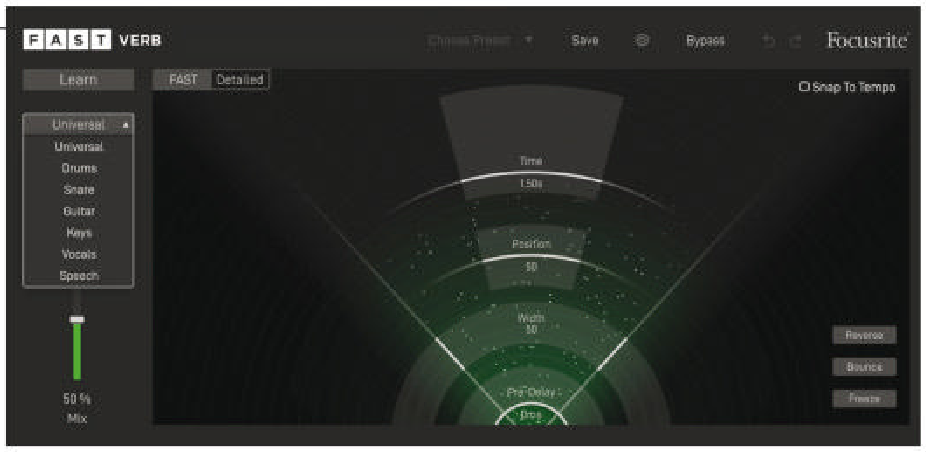
### CONS

- Bus powering requires a 15W USB-C connection.
- Control software won't be appealing to everyone.

### CONTACT

**INNOVATIVE MUSIC**
**Ph:** (03) 9540 0658
**Web:** innovativemusic.com.au

# Focusrite FAST Verb




THE AI-POWERED COLLECTIVE PLUGINS BRANCH OUT INTO REVERB. REVIEW BY **SI TRUSS**.

As the name suggests, this new plugin is all about reverb. As with the previous FAST tools, one of the headline features here is the analysis tool powered by Sonsible's AI tech. Simply play some audio into the plugin, hit Learn and the AI will suggest a reverb preset for you based on what it thinks will work best. To help this process, users can define a source type – including drums, vocals, keys, guitar and more – and then tailor the reverb style more by choosing between Natural, Balanced and Artificial options.

While it would be a misnomer to say there is a definitive right or wrong way to apply EQ or compression, it's certainly true that there are broad principles that define a standard way to treat certain instruments with each of those effect types. Reverb often comes down to taste as much as anything, as well as a balancing act with everything else going on in your mix.

In terms of the AI suggestions, FAST Verb's results were best in Natural mode. It's great at generating subtle reverb effects you don't really notice until the plugin is disengaged – the kind that can add a realistic sense of space and depth to, for example, a DI'd guitar or synth. Suggestions in Balanced or Artificial modes could at times sound unnatural without being overtly creative.

That said, beyond the AI tool, FAST verb has some great features that make it a deceptively handy creative effect. The interface is excellent, offering a clear visual representation of the main reverb parameters that responds dynamically to the output signal. It lets users adjust the size, position and pre-delay by dragging and extending/shortening each stage. In a particularly nice touch, these settings can be locked to project tempo, which makes it great for creating extreme, rhythmic spatial effects.

An advanced view brings up sliders to adjust reverb colour, monophonic bass cutoff and a high-pass filter. The best tools, however, are the Reverse, Bounce and Freeze modes, which can adjust the movement of the effect and create some really wonderful, unnatural digital reverbs. They sound particularly cool on percussive sounds when in tempo-locked mode.

What FAST Verb excels at then, are either instantaneous 'natural' verbs or far-out creative effects, but it's at its weakest when used for applications in between. Still, what FAST verb does well isn't quite like anything else on the market, and those capabilities are undoubtedly worth the price.

### VERDICT

FAST Verb is great for AI-generated 'natural' reverbs or far-out creative tweaking, but it has some weak spots in between these two poles.

### PROS

- Great for instant 'natural' space.
- Tempo-locked and reversed effects are a lot of fun.

### CONS

- Artificial and Balanced AI modes are less effective.
- Not the best for large hall reverbs.

### CONTACT

**INNOVATIVE MUSIC**
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RRP: $469

# Lehle Dual Expression Pedal

LEHLE SHRINKS DOWN THEIR MAGNETIC-SENSOR-POWERED EXPRESSION TECHNOLOGY AND UNLEASHES THE INNER AWESOME OF YOUR RIG. REVIEW BY **PETER HODGSON**.

When you open up the box to a new distortion pedal or something, you can feel that energy crackling on the air, the, "Hoo boy I'm gonna get noisy with this!" Knowing you're about to go play dirty. Or even a Whammy pedal: "The squeals I'm gonna make on this thing will make Vai blush…" But the New Pedal Energy is different with an expression pedal, isn't it? Different and more open-ended, because it's not about what the pedal itself sounds like, but what it can unlock in your existing gear. Unbox a distortion pedal and you know you're about to hear your guitar through distortion. Unbox an expression pedal and you don't even know half the wacky stuff you're going to be doing with this thing because it's as open-ended as each individual guitarist's gear collection.

The Lehle Dual Expression is an expression pedal with two outputs, which means you can really have some fun with controlling multiple devices at the same time. It controls all common devices that have expression inputs ranging from 5K to 100K, regardless of whether the connection type is TS, TRS or RTS (you can switch and store the polarity using the soft-push buttons). It's also capable of functioning as a MIDI controller via USB. You can also set the 10K output to work as a latching or momentary switch when the pedal is in full toe position. The example Lehle uses on their website is that you can use this function can be used to change channels of an amp or connected to the switch input of a digital device, but really it's as open-ended as everything else about this pedal's potential:

The Dual Expression borrows the same wear-free expression technology from the Lehle Volume pedal range. This magnetic technology uses the Hall effect –no, not Hall Reverb, but rather the scientist Edwin Hall, to measure the strength of magnetic fields. A magnet is built into the treadle of the unit, and a sensor is located in the body. The technology uses the distance between the magnet and the sensor, in cooperation with two digital potentiometers working with analog voltages, to generate the expression data. This makes it super accurate compared to physical, analog potentiometers which are prone to mechanical wear and all sorts of compromising environmental stuff.

Lehle has been able to lower the weight of the unit compared to the Mono Volume pedal by 50 percent and the size by 35 percent without sacrificing ruggedness, and it's even two centimetres flatter along the Y Axis, but the actual range of motion is the same as the larger models, meaning less space on your pedalboard and less weight to lug but all the functionality. It even uses low-friction bearings made of a high-performance polymer, and the tension of the pedal can be adjusted with plenty of precision. And Lehle stuff as a rule feels *tough*.

Now, being a dual expression pedal, you can do all sorts of frankly bonkers stuff with this pedal, and as these possibilities dawned upon me, my eyes lit up. Among the silly things I tried one evening include: a dual amp rig with the Dual Expression controlling the wah-wah from my Boss GT-8 and the pitch shift from an Eventide H9 (into separate amps) at the same time. I used it with an IK Multimedia AXE I/O Solo in USB mode as a MIDI controller to govern the gain level of a Marshall Jubilee-inspired model, and to control the speed of a Leslie emulation in IK's Syntronik synth plugin. I used it to increase the mix level of ambient synth-sounding shimmer-reverbs, and as a Whammy pedal, and at one point I even used it to control the overall volume of my DAW and my guitar processor signal feeding my Marshall at the same time.

And that's just finding ways to use it with what I have laying around: you'll discover all sorts of new things you can do with the Dual Expression pedal based on what you've got, from simply using it as an assignable expression pedal for whatever, to bringing together a complex rig with multiple signal chains. If you wanted, a lead guitarist could even have one output controlling their solo and delay volume on their rig while the other dips some mids out of the rhythm guitarist's Kemper patch or something, just to cut through the mix that little bit more. And it means you can achieve almost MIDI-like things with non-MIDI gear: if your stomp boxes are equipped with expression pedal jacks, you can do things like fade up your distortion level and your delay/reverb mix level at the same time.

The best thing about the seemingly indestructible Dual Expression is that it's limited only by the gear available to you. Your entire rig can grow around it, or it can perform a really simple job with ultimate reliability.

## ▶ VERDICT

It may not be as gut-level exciting as a boutique fuzz box or a cranked vintage combo creaking at the joints with tube tremolo, but it's capable of sending you on all sorts of creative flights.

## ▶ PROS

- Capable of functioning as a MIDI controller via USB.
- Lehle stuff as a rule feels tough.
- Limited only by the gear available to you.

## ▶ CONS

- None.

## ▶ CONTACT

**EGM DISTRIBUTION**
**Ph:** (03) 9817 7222
**Web:** egm.net.au

# Vox Mini Go 50

**RRP: $649.99**

VOX'S LATEST AMP IS PERFECT FOR AL FRESCO PERFORMANCE, WITH MAINS OR BATTERY POWER AND A HOST OF ONBOARD EXTRAS FOR PRACTICALLY ENDLESS FUN AND INSPIRATION. REVIEW BY **NICK GUPPY**.

We all know Vox's classic valve guitar amps go right back to the beginnings of pop and rock over 60 years ago, but it might come as a surprise for some that the company's digital modelling products have been with us for around 20 years now, writing a significant chapter in Vox's long and colourful history.

Unlike valves, digital guitar amplification methods are still being developed, and Vox's current modelling products use VET or Virtual Element Technology, an evolution of the original REMS engine used on early Valvetronix amps and effects, both of which were developed by Vox's parent company, synth giant Korg.

In keeping with Vox's reputation for innovation, VET incorporates many cutting-edge refinements and captures traditional valve circuits in unprecedented digital detail, as we found out last year on Vox's Cambridge50. Vox's new portable Mini Go range of amps is the latest to benefit from this exciting technology and here we're looking at the largest of the trio, the feature-laden Mini Go 50.

This is a compact and portable combo with a single eight-inch custom loudspeaker, housed in a smartly finished cabinet with a rear port to enhance bass frequencies. A diamond-patterned speaker grille echoes the famous cloth used on classic AC amps, and a prominent silver Vox badge shines in the top left corner.

There's no carry handle; instead, the amp comes with a shoulder strap that hooks on to a pair of side-mounted studs. There's also a small pair of tilt feet, which allow the Mini Go to be safely angled backwards for better monitoring.

Around the back there are two power sockets, one for the laptop-style mains adaptor and a USB-C for standard mobile five-volt power supplies, which means the Mini Go 50 can be used anywhere. There's a third socket for the optional VFS3 programmable footswitch, which remotely controls all the amp's essential functions.

The control panel has separate inputs for guitar and microphone, with a level Trim and aux Send control for the latter, feeding the Mini Go's delay and reverb effects. There are nine amp models in total, including seven well-known favourites from Vox's Cambridge50, together with a new Vocoder effect and a Line input for amplifying electro-acoustic guitars or keyboards. The amp controls include gain, bass, treble and master volume, which become bass, mid, treble and volume when the line input is selected.

A three-way power switch lets you select from either full power, 1/10th or 1/100th output, for stage, quiet practice or recording, and you can store and recall up to three patch settings. Below the amp controls, the Mini Go 50 has two effects sections: three modulations and an octaver on section one, and delays and reverbs on section two.

Next to the effects we find the Mini Go 50's drum machine, featuring 33 patterns grouped into distinct genres, with tempo and level controls. And there's still more to come in the shape of a looper with a handy maximum recording time of around 45 seconds, together with a tuner function, an aux in and a headphone output, both on 3.5mm jacks. The headphones output disables the speaker and can be used for silent recording when needed.

The Mini Go 50's amp voices use the same VET engine as the Cambridge50 and sound impressively authentic. The classic AC30 Normal and Top Boost channels both provide a wide range of excellent tones, from shimmering cleans and chiming rhythms to highly responsive classic rock and blues.

Beside these two gems, there's a tempting choice of Brit- and American-influenced cleans and overdrives, including the D-style Boutique Cl and Boutique OD, which both sound remarkably authentic, while gain fiends will enjoy the Double Rec and SL-OD simulations, which make even the weediest single coils sing with practically endless sustain and fat, chugging bass.

The new Vocoder voice is a strong special effect and perhaps best used sparingly. Used with a microphone it adds vowel sounds to single notes or chords as you speak or sing, or you can use it without a microphone, in which case the vowels are triggered by picking, which is another useful sound.

The Line input has enough clean headroom to take most keyboards without distorting, and the EQ will suit most electro-acoustics without too much fiddling around; it's a good, usable tone.

The other onboard effects don't disappoint, either, with lush chorus and phaser modulations, an authentically vintage-sounding tremolo and a fat octaver that turns into a mono synth bass at the end of the control knob's travel. Effects section two rounds things off with analogue and digital delays softened by spring or hall reverbs. While the guitar can access both effects sections, the microphone input is sensibly limited to delay and reverb.

The Mini Go 50's drum machine sounds aren't quite up to the same standard as its amp voices, but still more than adequate for live use, with a wide range of variations on each genre. The looper is easy to use and great fun, automatically quantising to a rhythm pattern, while the drum machine works vice versa, automatically adjusting tempo to recorded loops. As well as making the Mini Go 50 a powerful practice tool, these two features will spice up any solo live performance.

If you're planning on using the Mini Go 50 live then the optional VFS3 footswitch becomes more of a necessity as you can assign a variety of different functions to the three buttons: for example, operating the looper, switching effects on and off, or accessing the three saved patch settings.

We barely scratched the surface of the Mini Go 50's potential in the short time we had it, but it's clear that if you're a serious solo performer on the street/busking circuit, this is an amp you really need to become acquainted with. Combined with the rhythm machine and looper, there's plenty of inspiration on tap for original music or pro-standard covers, while the authentic amp sounds are first class, with plenty of power to make yourself heard and impressive lows from the ported cabinet. For non-buskers, this is still an inspiring practice and recording tool – the great tones will sit happily in any pro-standard recording.

As an overall package, it's amazing value for money. If you don't need the preset storage or the high power output, the Mini Go 10 is equally impressive, while the Mini Go 3 does away with the looper but retains those great amp sounds and the drum machine. Whichever you choose, the Mini Go amps all come with great fun included, which is surely what it's all about.

## ▶ VERDICT

A compact, do-it-all digital modelling combo that you can run on batteries and play anywhere, the Vox Mini Go 50 is an exceptional piece of kit, practical but ultimately lots of fun and tremendous value.

## ▶ PROS

- Perfect busker's companion.
- Built-in rhythm machine and looper.
- Amp sounds and effects.
- Foot-switchable.
- Can run on batteries.

## ▶ CONS

- We'd swap the Vocoder effect for another good amp voice.
- We wish the looper had 15 seconds' more recording time.

## ▶ CONTACT

**YAMAHA AUSTRALIA**
**Ph:** (03) 9693 5111
**Web:** au.yahama.com

RRP: $895

# Sterling By Music Man Cutlass Short Scale HS

AN AFFORDABLE INSTRUMENT THAT PRIORITISES VERSATILITY AND PLAYABILITY. REVIEW BY **ALEX WILSON**.

Short scale guitars are defined by a scale length of 24 inches - just shy of 60 centimetres. Known for generally being a bit easier to play, they are often chosen for children, students and those with smaller hands. But they've also been played extensively live and on record by some of the best, including John Frusciante, Johnny Marr, Kevin Shields and PJ Harvey. These artists, particularly via the 24-inch Jaguars and Mustangs from Fender, helped get the short scale out front.

It's best to think about the difference between short scale guitars and their longer compatriots as a set of trade-offs. Diminished distance between the nut and the bridge lessens the tension on the strings, increasing playability and responsiveness. Yet the increased tension of a longer scale delivers additional sustain and volume, also holding tune better under the duress of aggressive playing. These are just general truths and will vary to some extent given the specific guitar.

Enter the Sterling by Music Man Cutlass Short Scale (CSS), a compact and versatile instrument that sits in that "hard to define but know it when you play it" space we might call "quality budget" or "light premium". None of the specs here are close to best-in-class, but they nonetheless all work well together to create an instrument that is streamlined and sensible, with a few touches of unique personality to set it apart from the pack – namely other cheap short scales from, say, Fender and Ibanez.

Some of the personality definitely comes from the look. Big fan of the mint green/maple fingerboard and seashell pink/laurel fingerboard finish options, and of the body design that splits the difference between the Music Man and Fender schools of guitar aesthetics. It's surprisingly weighty for a small instrument, but the shape sits nicely with the hands and body.

The CSS body itself is poplar, and the neck is 22 frets. The radius is 12 inches, and feels fairly if not entirely flat. The chrome hardware comes with a fulcrum tremolo bridge. My review model lacked a trem arm, so I couldn't really test this aspect out, which was a shame. However, the bridge has a raised metal lip at the back. You can grip this with your fingers, pull upwards, and get the same tonal dip as you would from pulling the arm. This is a great little feature that helped save this aspect of the instrument.

Pickup-wise, we have a humbucking bridge and a single-coil neck. The neck pickup is slightly slanted, which I imagine would alter the tone and response slightly from a standard placement. The pickups are controlled by a three-way switch. While the overall build quality is not superlative, nothing stuck out as being especially bad either. The guitar is well-designed and so feels solid, functional and playable without the need for premium parts.

Sonically, the CSS offers a trio of tones via the three-way switch. The neck pickup gestures towards the fat sound of a Strat in the same position. The middle pickup chimes up the tone to land in the Telecaster ballpark. And reinforcing the rear is some raucous rock tone courtesy of the humbucker. Two big positives stick out to me here. Firstly, this is a useful array of sounds, allowing a good deal of stylistic diversity from one instrument. In other words, this can be a "main" guitar. Secondly, all the pickup positions work in harmony at the same perceived volume, hitting the amp and taking pedal changes in a consistent manner.

On the negative side, the low-midrange on the stock pickup set is a little too pronounced for my taste. It's nothing too terrible, and we can't expect the very best pickup sounds from a cheaper instrument. However that blurry hump does rob the instrument of some air and clarity. I can easily see someone who otherwise digs this guitar looking to swap the pickups out for a set with more pizzaz.

Under the hands, the guitar feels very playable. The neck doesn't feel especially fast or particularly sluggish, getting the job done unobtrusively. The lower tension makes expressive articulation, like bending, a relative breeze. Thankfully the intonation also holds up well across the neck, despite less string tightness. I found that by dialling in a little extra compression than usual, I could enjoy the benefits of the easy playability while still having a sound that felt big and bold.

Putting paid to the notion that short scale guitars are for kids, the CSS makes a good case for itself as an affordable, versatile instrument that prioritises approachability and playability. The guitar is simple and to-the-point, with no off-putting complexity nor poorly-implemented design choices to prevent your immersion in playing. Anyone who thinks that they would benefit from the shorter neck and lower tension on offer here should consider checking this here guitar out.

## VERDICT

The Sterling By Music Man Cutlass Short Scale HS is a solid, approachable instrument that could be elevated even further with some non-factory pups.

## PROS

- Streamlined and sensible, with a few touches of unique personality.
- Simple and to-the-point, with no off-putting complexity

## CONS

- None of the specs here are close to best-in-class.

## CONTACT

**CMC MUSIC**
**Ph:** (02) 9905 2511
**Web:** cmcmusic.com.au

RRP: $2,099

# Fender ToneMaster Super Reverb

THE LATEST VERSION OF A CLASSIC COMBO WITH A BIG-ASS TONE. REVIEW BY **ART THOMPSON**.

Anyone familiar with a Fender Super Reverb will testify to this legendary amp's big-ass tone, presence and clean headroom. The original formula of a pair of 6L6 power tubes and four ten-inch speakers gave the two-channel reverb/tremolo combo a sound that was irresistible to legions of blues and rock players from the mid '60s and on. The Super Reverb was discontinued in 1982 and re-introduced in 2001, where it remains in Fender's extensive amplifier line.

The latest version of this is the Tone Master Super Reverb, which uses digital technology to re-create the circuitry and 45-watt output section that drives four Jensen P-10R alnico-magnet ten-inch speakers wired in two-ohm configuration as per the original spec. Fender's designers maintained the Super's high headroom by using a 200-watt digital power amp, which underscores the difference between tube- and solid-state watts when it comes to pushing out sound.

The TM's power is variable in five stages from 45 watts down to .5 watt, and the amp has a balanced line out with a three-position switch that selects two different cabinet IRs (or off). Other than a USB port for firmware upgrades and the absence of both a speaker jack (the speaker wires go straight into the the chassis) and a reverb tank in the bottom of the cabinet, the amp is true to form in terms of the things you turn or toggle. A jewelled pilot light on the front panel glows orange when the mute/standby switch is on, and red when you flick on the power switch. It also has chromed tilt-back legs. The biggest physical difference is the TM's weight, which is about 30 pounds less than a tube-powered Super Reverb.

It sure makes a difference when hauling this big boy around, which I did for a handful of gigs, using it with a Reverend Gristlemaster fitted with Fishman Gristle-Tone pickups and a Fender Noventa Strat with two P-90s. Set to full power, and with the volume around five on the Vibrato channel, the amp was loud and had good headroom. A little grind also starts to come in around five, and from six to eight the TM's distortion voice becomes progressively more ballsy and sustaining. You can go from very clean to quite distorted by working the guitar volume, which makes for easy transitions between rhythm and lead if you're going au natural and not using pedals. It's nice that you can reduce the power to 22 or 12 watts – or even five, one or .5 – if you want to use higher settings and keep a lid on the volume.

The onboard tremolo sounds good, and the reverb (which is also foot switchable via the included two-button switcher) adds a nice airiness at about three and has that cool immersiveness of blackface-style reverb when you turn it up. A Fulltone OCD overdrive and a pair of UAFX pedals – the Astra Modulation Machine and Starlight Echo Station – also sounded good running into the front end (there's no effects loop), delivering aggressive stomp-box distortion and a wide variety of modulation and delay effects.

Does the TM Super Reverb differ sonically from a tube model? Sure it does, which isn't surprising given the disparate technologies involved. A mid-'60s Super Reverb sounded girthier and more prismatic, while the TM has a somewhat flatter or less enveloping soundstage. The tactile difference is perhaps more noticeable, however, as the TM is more compressed feeling overall, which may be a characteristic of limiting in the 200-watt power stage. It's different than the organic "sag" that's felt under the fingers and in your picking when a tube amp is turned up.

Of course, nobody in the audience cares about any of this stuff, so all that really matters is the Tone Master Super Reverb's ability to deliver enough mojo to make it an option for performance situations, where it's all too tempting to give your back a break and leave your vintage beast at home. Digital has other advantages as well. The TM is quieter than a tube model – dead quiet, in fact – and the line-out's cabinet IR selections are handy as they provide two good-sounding mic options (condenser and dynamic) to facilitate silent recording or live situations where it might be simpler to go direct to the FOH.

## ▶ VERDICT

If you lust for the blues-rock power of Fender's classic four-by-ten reverb combo, but want it in a lighter, more affordable package with added features, this amp living proof that, when it comes to this unique combo, you can have it both ways.

## ▶ PROS

- A reasonably authentic sounding Super Reverb that is much easier to carry.
- XLR direct out with two cabinet IRs provide enhanced flexibility.

## ▶ CONS

- None.

## ▶ CONTACT

**FENDER**
**Ph:** (02) 8198 1300
**Web:** fender.com

# Fender Acoustasonic Player Telecaster

**RRP: $2,199**

A REMARKABLE FEAT IN TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN, NOW MORE AFFORDABLE FOR THE EVERYDAY PLAYER. REVIEW BY **ALEX WILSON**.

Fender's Acoustasonic series testifies to their willingness to innovate. The guitar market offers a great deal of granular brand choice, but doesn't really mess with the fundamentals of classic guitar design too often. New instruments that don't merely play to a consumer niche, but attempt to open up some unexplored creative spaces, are rare. The initial American Acoustasonic Series showed remarkable technical and design aptitude via its unique reimagining of the acoustic/electric guitar binary. But with its very high price point, these US-made instruments were not available to everybody.

The Acoustasonic Player Telecaster, made in Ensenada, Mexico, knocks a big chunk off the price of the American line. This is a good thing, since the experience of playing and creating offered by this design will cater to a number of tastes, ranging from enthusiastic young people starting their guitar journey to studio types who are looking for new guitar sounds a bit different from the norm. The creative and tactile immediacy of an acoustic is built deep into the Player Telecaster. But whereas your standard steel-string only outputs a firmly "acoustic guitar" sound from its cable jack, the Acoustasonic can easily, quickly and convincingly dress itself in electric clothes.

The chambered Player Telecaster guitar itself is remarkably similar in shape and body-feel to a typical Telecaster – it's a bit lighter and the cutaway is also something different, but increasingly common in new Fender designs. The guitar body is mahogany, with a spruce top. The neck, also mahogany, has a rosewood fingerboard, which is also used on the bridge. The particular model we had for review had a butterscotch blonde finish, and there are also white, black and sunburst finishes available. The vintage-modern aesthetic comes off convincingly, lending the Acoustasonic character and credibility. For the active electronics to work well, you'll need to keep you 9V batteries handy, which live in the typical small bay in the back.

The circuitry is based on two pickups, two knobs, and a three-way switch. The pickups are an under-saddle piezo pickup located beneath the bridge, as well as an N4 magnetic pickup located in the bridge position. The pickup selector doesn't control the pickups per se. Fender describe it as a "voice selector" which allows choice of one of three "voice pairs" where A and B sounds are blended with, well… the blend knob. A standard volume pot rounds it all out.

Unplugged, the guitar is louder and bolder than one may expect from its size and small sound hole. It's small stature robs it off the bassy oomph you might get from big acoustic guitars, but it makes up for it with what we might call good brightness. There's a pronounced spank and sparkle in the high-mids. So while it's not quite the same as the familiar strumbox, it's not meant to be and it has its own thing going on. The neck is smooth, and helps the fingers to feel nimble. Despite retaining a little of the extra string resistance of a steel-string neck, the Player Telecaster definitely leans towards the playability of an electric.

Plugged in, the Player Telecaster offers a variety of sounds, all of which work well through a preamp and cab, or merely as Dis. The neck position on the switch offers two varieties of acoustic guitar, a dreadnought or a short-scale, accessible via the blend switch. Middle position offers a "lo-fi" sound, a kind non-specific blend of clean electric and acoustic tones with variable crunch available to blend. And the bridge position reveals what a slightly acoustified hybrid Tele pickup, blending back and forth between the classic clean and the raucous rhythm sounds. The blend knob reacts consistently across the different voices. That is, the back A position contains the cleaner, more focused end of the voice, the front B position the fatter and/or ruckus vibe.

As you can tell from the descriptions, many of these sounds the Player Telecaster makes are hard to put in a familiar box. It pulls off no mean feat, providing a versatile array of notably new tones, none of which are cheesy or gimmicky, all of which integrate well into the standard guitar signal flow. While this is impressive simply as a design achievement, what I found really striking was how the technical prowess of the manufacture assisted my creativity. At least for me, the feeling of newness and fresh. I felt excited to play it spontaneously, interested in recording its unique sound, and generally inspired by how my familiar moves were given a fresh coat of paint by the difference-spitting electric-acoustic tone.

To expand some earlier points, this would be a fine choice for students who are taking to the guitar, want bang for their buck, but are not ready to commit to either the acoustic or electric track. I can also see it really suiting live performers who want to bring the authenticity of an acoustic sound and the flexibility of an electric onto the stage, without the hassle of instrument-switching. Finally, as one of the aforementioned studio types, it's great to have an axe come along which sounds that bit different.

### ▸ VERDICT

The Acoustasonic Player Telecaster is both an argument for re-evaluating and re-imagining the standard tropes of guitar manufacturing, and at the same time just a great instrument that is simultaneously novel and familiar.

### ▸ PROS

- Louder and bolder than one may expect from its size and small sound hole.
- A versatile array of notably new tones, none of which are cheesy or gimmicky.

### ▸ CONS

- None.

### ▸ CONTACT

**FENDER**
**Ph:** (02) 8198 1300
**Web:** fender.com

# Ashdown Pro-FX Two-Band Boost

VOLUME AND TREBLE BOOST IN ONE TONESOME PEDAL.
REVIEW BY **TREVOR CURWEN**.

**RRP: TBC**

Perhaps better known for all things bass, Ashdown also caters for us six-stringers with both amps and the Pro-FX pedals, which is a six-strong series that also includes three optimised for bass players. Ashdown says it wanted "an affordable range of pedals distinctive in looks, but, most importantly, characterful in tone and features".

While the company has had a range of larger pedals powered at 18 volts, these are smaller with a more 'board-friendly footprint and are known as the 'Pro-FX

nine volt range' because all of them run from a nine-volt supply (though not from battery power), supporting most pedalboard power distributors.

The Pro-FX Two-Band Boost has been designed by Ashdown's Dave Green, who was responsible for the Dr Green effects range launched back in 2013. It sports a robust metal casing with four small rubber feet and feature a lit Ashdown logo when active. The front-facing connections facilitate close side-by-side pedalboard placement.

Looking very much like it has taken its legacy from Dr Green's 'Booster Shot' pedal, the Two-Band Boost offers both a treble boost and a full-band boost, each dialled in with its own knob. The idea here is that you can have one or the other separately or in combination.

The Full boost on its own starts to give an apparent volume boost upwards of one o'clock on the knob, and provides plenty to drive an amp as you turn it up. It adds a fat midrange in the process, albeit accompanied by a perception of a more subdued treble.

The Treble Boost is actually a bit of a misnomer as the knob by itself offers no volume boost at all and little in the way of treble, although it does seem to offer a more scooped midrange. However, it does add some top-end to the Full Boost sound, so you can subtly tweak your overall boost with careful juxtaposition of the knobs.

**VERDICT**

A boost pedal that will take your sound up a level with integral tonal shading

**PROS**

- Plenty of boost to drive your amp. And a little midrange oomph too.

**CONS**

- Treble Boost offers no volume boost on its own.

**CONTACT**

**MUSIC & AUDIO AUSTRALIA**
**Ph:** 0466 390 079
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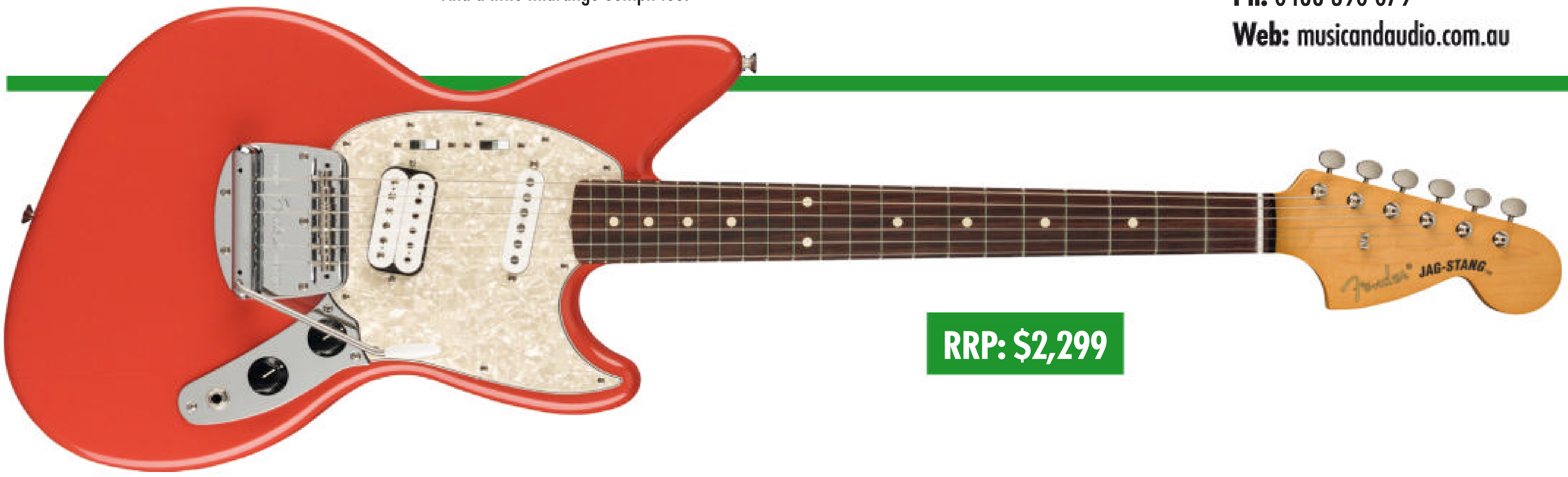


**RRP: $2,299**

# Fender Kurt Cobain Jag-Stang

IT'S LOVE AT FIRST STRUM WITH THIS NEW TAKE ON A GRUNGE ICON. REVIEW BY **CHRIS GILL**.

Fender approached Kurt Cobain about collaborating on the design of a guitar. Cobain was amused but also flattered by the proposal, and he quickly conceived and sketched a new design that combined features of his favourite guitars: a modified 1965 Fender Jaguar and a 1969 Fender Competition Mustang. The Nirvana guitarist called his creation the Jag-Stang. Fender delivered the first Jag-Stang prototype to Cobain in early 1994, and the guitarist used it for a handful of shows that year before he took his own life on April 5, 1994.

Fender produced the Jag-Stang from 1995 through 2005 when it was discontinued, but Fender recently revived the model in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the release of Nirvana's breakthrough *Nevermind* album. The new version differs just slightly from the original run, but it still offers players seeking Cobain's iconoclastic brand of musical rebellion a tonal palette that stands apart from the crowd.

The most distinctive feature of the Kurt Cobain Jag-Stang is its elongated compact offset body shape that's based on a Mustang's upper bout combined with a Jaguar's lower bout. While the original production model had a basswood body, this version's body is made of heftier alder (like a vintage Jaguar and some Sixties Mustangs). Like the original Jag-Stang, the body has no belly or arm rest contours, and it is available with either a Sonic Blue or Fiesta Red finish.

The Jag-Stang's neck is constructed of maple with a rosewood fingerboard. Neck features include a 24-inch Mustang scale length, 22 vintage thin profile frets, 7.25-inch radius, slim C-shape profile and 1.575-inch nut width (slightly wider than the original Jag-Stang's nut). The pickups are a custom Jag-Stang bridge humbucker (7.18k ohm resistance) and custom Jag-Stang neck single-coil (5.73k ohm resistance), which each are wired to separate three-position slider switches with on, off and phase settings as well as master volume and master tone controls. Hardware consists of a Mustang rocker bridge with six barrel saddles, Mustang "dynamic vibrato" tailpiece, vintage-style tuners, Jazz Bass-style knobs and four-ply aged white pearloid pickguard.

Although the Jag-Stang has a somewhat compact body like a Mustang as well as a shorter 24-inch scale length, our example was heavier than we expected thanks to its alder body construction. Played in a standing position, the body feels impressively well balanced thanks to the extended lower treble bout, which also contributes to the model's tonal punch and depth by providing additional body mass below the bridge. The large CBS-era-style headstock also enhances the model's tonal range, resulting in surprisingly big sound for a relatively small guitar.

The 24-inch scale results in a slinky feel that makes it easy to perform dramatic string bends. The Jag-Stang ships with .010-.046 gauge strings, but players could use heavier .011 or .012 sets without experiencing uncomfortable string tension. The slim C neck is exceptionally comfortable as well. One request that Cobain made after receiving the prototype was having belly and armrest contours added, and I wish the Jag-Stang featured that for added comfort.

Although the individual slider switches for each pickup don't facilitate ultra-quick tonal switching during performance, they do offer a wide range of cool and unusual tones. To me, the humbucking bridge/single-coil neck configuration is highly underrated, and here the switches allow users to take advantage of this setup's versatility. The humbucker has a vivid growl that pairs well with a high-gain amp, delivering snappy percussive attack and bristling definition with an aggressive midrange wallop. The neck pickup sounds round and punchy, but it also shines on clean settings where it delivers great tones for funk and blues. The out of phase settings have a snotty, nasal personality that's distinctive and oddly alluring.

**VERDICT**

Resurrected for the 30th anniversary of *Nevermind*, the Kurt Cobain Jag-Stang is ideal for Nirvana fans or anyone who wants to explore their own brand of subversive sounds.

**PROS**

- 24-inch Mustang scale length allows guitarists to use heavier gauge strings without string bending fatigue.

**CONS**

- Out of phase settings' snotty, nasal personality might not be for everyone.

**CONTACT**

**FENDER**
**Ph:** (02) 8198 1300
**Web:** fender.com

# Epiphone USA Casino

A BRIT-ROCK STAPLE THAT CAN DO MUCH MORE THAN OASIS AND KINKS COVERS. REVIEW BY **JAMES ROTONDI**.

**RRP: $6,499**

Like most of us, my first impulse when picking up the handsome new USA-built Epiphone Casino was to play some Beatles, Oasis and Kinks riffs, and man, does it ever deliver that classic British rock sound: spanky, resonant and woody, with that touch of chambery depth that only a proper hollow-body guitar can really capture. Even unamplified, it's unmistakable and iconic, and this new USA Casino – the first to be built in the U.S. since 1971 – absolutely nails what makes the Casino great. From McCartney to Weller to Gallagher, we know what a Casino can do, right?

Well, it would be a mistake to continue to pigeonhole the Casino as strictly a guitar for British-inspired power pop, no matter how ably and powerfully it works in that context. That is especially true of a Casino as premium as this $2,699 model, which is a huge improvement over more recent Asian-made Casinos. Keep in mind, this is essentially a Gibson 330-style guitar with high-output single-coil P-90 pickups, so while it's naturally a little more wily and open sounding than, say, a 335, when played through a cranked tube amp, in most other contexts the Casino can ably handle a lot of the same basic territory, with a wild edge of its own.

Likewise, the two Gibson USA Dogear P-90 pickups here may not be some bluesmen's first choice, though they've been a key go-to for T-Bone Walker, Freddie King and, lately, Gary Clark, Jr. and Joe Bonamassa. However, they give licks and rhythms a very pleasing mid-frequency spread and a dynamic, hard-to-peg character, making the USA Casino a wicked guitar for electric blues, full of character and punch, but with great detail and grit as well. (Ditto for non-Brit rock and roll. Look to The Strokes' Nick Valensi for evidence of its stateside power.)

At lower volumes, or through clean-headroom amps like those made by Henriksen, AER, Brute and others, the USA Casino is a hip, lean alternative to a conventional hollow-body archtop for sets of jazz standards, with plenty of body and vintage character. Chime and punch? Sure, and plenty more.

Unboxing the light, captivating USA Casino was a treat from the outset, given the fairly luxurious Epiphone hard case that it ships with, and it just feels like the premium U.S.-built instrument it is. Our review model boasted the Royal Tan nitro lacquer finish and nickel pickup covers. (It also comes in a yummy Vintage Sunburst finish with black Dogear pickup covers.) Those two P-90s, mind you, are Gibson USA P-90s, featuring vintage-style braided two-conductor wiring, and they're wax potted to minimise the potential for microphonic feedback. More on that in a minute.

The solid-mahogany, 22-fret, rounded-C neck shape is topped with an Indian rosewood fingerboard, kissed by those fantastic acrylic parallelogram fret inlays, and comfortably laid out with a 12-inch neck radius over a scale length of 24.75 inches. It's an exceedingly comfortable neck and, even without any special setup, was balanced, with fine action and zero buzzing. It felt natural and smooth to fan out over the entire breadth of the fingerboard. In fact, perhaps due to the 12-inch radius, and assisted by the 1.69-inch Graph Tech nut, stretches from the 17th to 22nd fret translated as even and solid, whether for triads, double-stops or more-ambitious voicings.

There's also a nice way that the quarter-sawn spruce binding on the hollow body seems to "talk" to the neck as you play. Your left hand senses that this neck is attached to a slim hollow body, and so your hand is informed by that. It's subtle, but noteworthy, and no doubt the Gibson ABR-1 Tune-o-matic bridge and Thinline Trapeze tailpiece play their roles in that, too. The artfulness of that body cut is palpable, as well. Perhaps that three-ply maple/poplar/maple top, back and sides just wanted to be carved, but there's a contoured, roundness to the way the USA Casino feels tucked under your arm, and while not a small body, by any means, it doesn't feel so big once you're playing it. But man, it sure sounds big.

I ran the USA Casino through three distinct amp rigs: a Victory V4 The Duchess with 1x12 Neodymium cabinet, a Suhr Badger 30 with 1x12 cabinet, and a Line 6 HX Stomp with various amp models chosen to reflect the vintage Vox amps with which the Casino really made its bones. In the case of the two tube amps, the sound was big and lively even clean, with the bridge position giving some nice subtle grit and the sound mellowing considerably on the middle blend and neck positions. The neck pickup is quite full in the lows and low mids. Roll the corresponding tone pot down just a little – one of four hand-wired controls with Orange Drop capacitors – and you've got a vintage jazz box in hand.

Despite knowing that the P-90s are wax potted, I was still concerned about possible microphonic feedback at louder volumes and with pedals, a concern which turned out to be more of a "note to self" and a usable feature. There is definitely some element of acoustic air in the sound, and especially with a distortion pedal on – in this case, switching from TS-9 to DS-1 to ToneBender-style sounds – you're going to need to control this thing by judicious use of your right and left hands to dampen the strings. The plus side is that you've basically got a built-in e-bow with this guitar – a little drive or fuzz, and you can sustain a note for days. The neck and body just vibrate. In other words, the guitar really talks and responds to the sound and vibrations coming out of your amp.

That said, I found the Casino to maintain its rich, spanky sound through the Line 6 HX Stomp's various Vox-inspired amp models and a pair of studio monitors, though feedback was not an issue at all in that environment. From chugging Oasis-approved cowboy-chord rhythms to fat "Day Tripper"-style riffs, there was really nothing in the canon of British pop-rock that didn't sound authentic with the USA Casino through a high-level amp modeller.

Gibson's decision to reappraise the role of the Epiphone Casino in its product line, and to bring its manufacture back to the US, is no small matter. Before this year, you'd pay anywhere from $10,000 to $20,000 for a vintage USA-made Casino, as you'd be looking at a 1961 to 1970 model at the latest. As for the many lesser pre-2019 Epiphones knocked out by Gibson's previous regime, you can easily find one for under $1,000, and they're attractive enough and they'll do the job.

Still, the new Epiphone USA Casino strikes me as an entirely reasonable deal if the Casino as a Platonic ideal is calling out to you.

## ▶ VERDICT

This American beauty is stunning to look at, a joy to play and record with, and an investment worth making whether you rock a mop-top or not.

## ▶ PROS

- Lovely contours, classic looks and vibrant tones.
- Great playability and classy appointments.

## ▶ CONS

- Rock and blues players who crank it up will need to learn how to dampen feedback.

## ▶ CONTACT

**AUSTRALIS MUSIC GROUP**
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# Gibson Generation G-00 and G-200

**RRP: TBC**

THESE TWO STANDOUTS FROM GIBSON'S NEW GENERATION LINE OFFER PORT AUTHORITY. REVIEW BY **CHRIS GILL**.

By design, the traditional acoustic guitar is built to project sound toward the listening audience. Unfortunately, this places the ears of the person playing the guitar in a less than optimal position behind and above the guitar's soundhole. Sure, most acoustic guitars still sound pretty damn good from the player's perspective, but it's just not as good as it could be – or is it?

Over the years, luthiers have experimented with placing sound ports on an acoustic guitar's side (usually the upper bass bout) to direct at least some of the guitar's output upward towards the player as well. Numerous builders have adopted this feature, including, most notably, John Monteleone on his dazzling archtops, so there's certainly some validity to this approach. Recently, Gibson joined the ranks of guitar builders that offer side sound ports with the introduction of its new Generation Collection guitars.

The Gibson Generation Collection currently consists of four different models: the G-00 (parlor), G-45 (round-shoulder dreadnought), G-Writer (square-shoulder dreadnought cutaway) and G-200 (jumbo cutaway). The first two models are purely acoustic, while the latter two have built-in LR Baggs Element Bronze under-saddle pickup/preamp electronic systems. We took a look at the G-00 and G-200, which are the least and most expensive Generation models, respectively.

The G-00 is based upon the design of the 14-fret neck Gibson L-00 introduced in the '30s, while the G-200 is based on Gibson's classic J-200 model but with slightly slimmer dimensions. Both models share common features and specs, including a Sitka spruce top, walnut back and sides and utile (an African tonewood with properties similar to mahogany) neck with striped ebony fingerboard. Both tops have traditional scalloped X-bracing and the bodies and necks have a satin nitrocellulose finish. The necks have Gibson's slim, rounded neck profile, a 16-inch radius, 20 standard (medium) frets, 1.73-inch nut width, Tusq nut and saddle and chrome Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners. Both are also constructed using a compound dovetail neck-to-body joint affixed with hot hide glue to facilitate better tone transfer throughout the guitar.

There are a few differences between the two models, however. The G-00 has a 24.75-inch scale length, and the fingerboard has acrylic dot inlays. The bridge has a rectangular design, and is made of striped ebony. The G-200 has a longer 25.5-inch scale length, and is decorated with fancier G-Collection single bar fret marker fingerboard inlays and single-layer black binding surrounding the body's top and back. The G-200's bridge features a "belly down" design, and is also made of striped ebony. The biggest difference between the two models is that the G-200 includes a built-in LR Baggs Element Bronze under-saddle pickup and preamp with soundhole mounted volume control and quarter-inch endpin output jack.

Both the G-00 and G-200 are expertly constructed by the highly skilled craftsmen at Gibson's Bozeman, Montana, acoustic guitar factory. The satin nitrocellulose finish is applied so thin that the materials almost look unfinished, but what these guitars lack in glitz and gloss they more than compensate for in tone and dynamic responsiveness. The Gibson Player Port on the side is surrounded with a plastic ring that reinforces the hole and prevents damage. Construction is clean, solid and meticulous, and the guitar's provide outstanding playability thanks to the slim neck profile.

Tonally, both models sound quite different than one would expect, thanks to the side port. The sound is louder, but also more focused and direct than one might expect. While some of the sound is directed out of the side toward the player, the side player port does not adversely affect the primary tone coming out of the traditional soundhole.

The small-body G-00 sounds like a good parlor-size acoustic should, with well-balanced overall tone that's ideal for fingerstyle playing. The jumbo G-200 model delivers bigger bass and bolder treble, with a nice, warm midrange that makes strummed chord rhythms drive like a freight train. The LR Baggs Element Bronze system produces outstanding natural acoustic tone. While having only a volume control seems rather no frills, it's actually nice to part with the redundancy of EQ and feedback suppression features commonly found on acoustic-electric guitar amps these days.

## ▶ VERDICT

The small-body G-00 sounds like a good parlor-size acoustic should, with well-balanced overall tone that's ideal for fingerstyle playing. The jumbo G-200 model delivers bigger bass and bolder treble, with a nice, warm midrange that makes strummed chord rhythms drive like a freight train.

## ▶ PROS

- The sound is louder, but also more focused and direct than one might expect.

## ▶ CONS

- None.

## ▶ CONTACT

**AUSTRALIS MUSIC GROUP**

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**Web:** australismusic.com.au

**RRP: $279 (RIPPED SPEAKER) $635 (NANO DELUXE MEMORY MAN)**

# Electro-Harmonix Ripped Speaker and Nano Deluxe Memory Man

TWO NEW PEDALS OFFERING THE BEST EHX HAVE TO OFFER IN THE 2020S. REVIEW BY **ART THOMPSON**.

Two new EHX pedals arrived recently, one modern and the other a modern take on one of the company's greatest pedals of all time. Respectively, the Ripped Speaker fuzz and the Nano Deluxe Memory Man are equally cool in their own way and offer hip features that warrant a deeper look.

## RIPPED SPEAKER

Designed to deliver everything from vintage buzz to blistering, shred-metal fuzz, the Ripped Speaker is a four-knob pedal that, along with fuzz, tone and volume controls, has a powerful rip control that adjusts the bias of the circuit to vary the amount of clipping at the top or bottom of the waveform (more on this to come). It's convenient that the pedal can be powered by a battery or external nine-volt DC adapter (not included), and it has a click-on/click-off mechanical true-bypass foot switch and a small red LED that doesn't blind you when you kick it on. A glass-epoxy PCB grips the components, which you can see in all their glory by removing the bottom plate.

Tested with a Gibson '59 Historic Les Paul and a Reverend Gristlemaster T-styler (both through either a Fender Deluxe Reverb or a '66 Vibro-Champ), the Ripped Speaker easily made its case for being a great all-rounder that can deliver everything from soft, fuzzy distortion (like a loose or faulty tube – or torn speaker – might make) to '60s-style buzz (think "Spirit in the Sky") to chonking, modern grind.

The aforementioned rip knob is a powerful function that assists in dialing in anything from the heaviest tones to the sickest "dying transistor" hash. With the knob set between 11 o' clock and noon, it delivers the smoothest and least compressed response – i.e, the go-to for jacked-up blues or hard rock. Turn it in either direction and the tones descend into gated and spitty-sounding timbres that are more sound-effect-y and fun in their own way.

By setting the fuzz knob low, keeping tone around noon and working the guitar volume, you can elicit tones that sound like a small, cranked-up tube amp. The pedal cleans up well when the guitar is turned down, making it possible to get sweet and slightly gritty clean tones that are so expressive and sensitive to picking dynamics. Turning up the fuzz control brings on increasing amounts of saturation that can be steered into searing lead or thick, bottom heaviness, depending on how you set the tone control and how hard the Ripped Speaker is driving the amp with its abundant output. Armed with a wealth of fuzz flavours, the Ripped Speaker qualifies as a do-it-all fuzz that comes at a surprisingly low price for all it does.

## NANO DELUXE MEMORY MAN

Introduced in 1978, the Deluxe Memory Man delivered rich, clear tones that made it a hit with musicians and set a standard for analog delay that endures to this day. The Nano DMM is the latest version of this classic, and, along with a compact housing, it now includes a rate control for the modulation and an internal switch located on the foot-switch board for selecting true bypass (the default stock setting) or buffered bypass, which preserves the delay tails when the effect is switched off.

The unit has blend, feedback, delay, level, rate and depth controls, a pair of LEDs for status and overload, a front-mounted jack for the nine-volt DC power input, and side-mounted input and output jacks.

Plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb or a Victoria Double Deluxe 2x12 combo, the Nano DMM proved itself an excellent delay that sounds lush and crystal clear at settings ranging from slapback echo to long ambient delays. Even the repeats stay very clear when the feedback knob is turned up to around four o' clock, where the echoes start drifting into self-oscillation. The noise level is also practically nil at high delay/feedback settings, which is very cool.

The addition of the rate control is a great feature that allows you to adjust the modulation for everything from tape-like wobble to shimmering vibrato. Delay always sounds better with some modulation, and now you can dial in the speed for exactly the modulation and feel that works best for you. In addition, the level knob lets you set the perfect volume for when the effect is activated. The Electro-Harmonix Nano Deluxe Memory Man brings a new level of enjoyment to this classic effect.

### VERDICT

The EHX Ripped Speaker is a do-it-all fuzz that comes at a surprisingly low price for all it does. The Nano Deluxe Memory Man, on the other hand, is a must-have for anyone who thrives on the lush, organic vibe of analog echo.

### PROS

- Ripped Speaker has a wide range of fuzz tones.
- Nano Deluxe Memory Man has a rich, clear analog sound and very low noise.

### CONS

- Nano Deluxe Memory Man's knobs feel a little cramped on the small enclosure.

### CONTACT

**VIBE MUSIC**

**Web:** vibemusic.com.au

**RRP: $749**

# Boss IR-200 Amp & IR Cabinet

BOSS' NEW AMP MODELLER IS FEATURE-PACKED AND READY FOR A WHACK.

REVIEW BY **DAVE HUNTER**.

Amp modelling isn't new territory for Boss. The company has plied those waters for many years and to popular effect with latter-day products like the GT-1000 floor controller and Katana amp series. But this compact and truly stompbox-sized offering somehow feels like a step in a new and entirely natural direction. The IR-200 Amp & IR Cabinet presents an impressive features-to-size ratio and might be one of the boldest efforts yet to squeeze an entire rig into the smallest space possible, while still offering a comprehensive menu of amp types, cab sims, room reverbs and bountiful user-programmable preset slots.

In naming the IR-200 Amp & IR Cabinet, Boss has overtly recognised the explosion in credence given to an impulse response (IR) technology and its ability to accurately replicate the sounds of speaker cabinets in the digital realm, while potentially confusing the issue a little. The feature is just a small fraction of what this little box can do. It also packs eight guitar amps (the usual classics from clean, to jangle, to crunch, to singing lead), three bass amps, dual IR slots for genuine stereo processing (with 154 IRs from Boss and Celestion and 128 user-loadable slots), and EQ and spatial processing. All this, plus a full and intuitive amp-like interface, bountiful connectivity, and easy access and edit functions. So, deep breath... Let's dive in.

Controls in the amp section include the self-explanatory gain, level, bass, middle and treble knobs. Call up a preset using the memory rotary selector in the top-right of the unit (which doubles as headphone volume when pushed) or the up/down foot switches and these parameters will all be fixed per preset. But turn the gain control, for example, and the display shows the change in setting, along with the current preset settings of the other knobs. The amp and cabinet controls dial alternatives for each of those within any selected preset (push either one to enter and tweak their parameters), and the ambience knob determines the reverb depth while it accesses the three main types: Hall, Room and Studio. All changes can be saved as new presets in any of 128 user memory slots.

Connectivity is impressive for a box this size. There's a single input, FX loop send with stereo return, stereo outputs, MIDI in and out on mini jacks, aux in, stereo headphone out, connection for control or expression pedals, and a USB port that lets you use the pedal as an interface for recording on Mac, Windows, and iOS devices. Some naysayers will point out the lack of XLR outputs, but those would be a tough fit on this 5-by-4-by-1.75-inch box. The available stereo quarter-inch outs should adapt to any conceivable requirement – although they're unbalanced TS, and balanced TRS would have been a nice touch.

Tech-wise, it's all backed up by 32-bit AD/DA conversion using Roland/Boss's Adaptive Focus method, at a sampling frequency of 96 kHz, with 32-bit floating-point processing. If you're noting a lack of pedal-style effects, that's what the loop is for. Rare in a unit this size, the mono send and stereo return are intended for full integration with your pedalboard, which is where Boss sees this box putting down roots. Drive pedals in front, delay and modulation in the loop, and Bob's your uncle.

I tested the IR-200 in stereo with studio monitors and headphones, and in mono with a Tech 21 Power Engine Deuce Deluxe, using a Les Paul and a Stratocaster, and I found it both easy to come to grips with and a lot of fun. Although the guitar-amp models seem a bit generic – a clean original Boss platform, a JC-120, a Twin Reverb, an AC30, a tweed Bassman, a Boss X-Hi Gain, a Marshall Super Lead and a Bogner Uberschall – they're each well-judged renditions of the archetype and won't likely befuddle the average user. Each is broadly tweakable with respect to speaker cabinet, miking and room ambience options, as well as the usual gain and EQ parameters, and it's easy to find usable, enjoyable and fully personalisable sounds.

If anything, the cleaner options are a little sterile, without the tube-y edge-of-breakup tone some would like to attain when dialing in the real thing at the sweet spot. But as part of a floor-based fly rig with a selection of pedals for dirt, they proved entirely adequate and played nicely with a TS9 Tube Screamer, an Angry Charlie and a Wampler Tumnus Deluxe, for starters. Crank up the crunch and high-gain-intended models, though, dial them in to taste, and it's difficult not to find yourself smiling, especially with a little volume going in the room to aid touch sensitivity and sustain, or a nice ambient stereo mix in the cans.

The IR-200 will find some natural rivals in the Strymon Iridium and Atomic Ampli FireBox, both of which are in a similar price range and excel at their basic amp sounds – if falling a little short on presets, deep-dive programmability and LCD displays. Though the IR-200's screen may look outdated, it's very readable in most lights.

## ▶ VERDICT

All in all, this is a fun and powerful pedal that is likely to be extremely popular.

## ▶ PROS

- An impressive selection of amp models and IR cabs in a compact unit at a great price, with versatile interface and routing options.

## ▶ CONS

- Clean amp models might sound a little sterile.

## ▶ CONTACT

**ROLAND AUSTRALIA**
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# Cort Core-OC Series

THEY MAY LOOK ALMOST IDENTICAL, BUT IT'S THE BODY WOODS THAT MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE FOR THIS TRIO – AND THEY'RE OUTSTANDINGLY AFFORDABLE, TOO. REVIEW BY **DAVID MEAD**.

**RRP: $999**

In a slight diversion away from our more customary 'round-up' review where we take similar models from different manufacturers and compare them, this time we've taken a trio from a single maker. Why? Because Cort's Core-OC range shown here features instruments that are identical in terms of build and only differ in the all-solid timber used for their tops, backs and sides, and so it seems an excellent opportunity to explore the theory that different woods offer a subtle difference in tone.

Cort itself says, "These carefully crafted instruments are all-solid wood and we offer them in three tonewood options to allow you to select the exact sound that you prefer." Which is kinda what we just said. But the company continues: "The idea behind the Core range is that Cort wanted to make an all-solid electro-cutaway at a price point a beginner could afford, but with no compromises on build quality or specification, that could be used on any stage." All admirable stuff.

The wood variations here are all-mahogany, spruce top with mahogany back and sides, and an all-blackwood model. So is it a case of 'Vive la différence'? Or just, 'Sorry guys, but... meh'? Let's dig in, don our lab coats and start the experiment.

To begin with it might be a good idea to temporarily shelve the differences between these three acoustics and consider what they share in common. In basic terms, the Core models are OM-sized electro-cutaways that feature dovetail-jointed mahogany necks with ovangkol fretboards and bridges, 20 frets and a 643mm (25.3-inch) scale length. Tuners are unbranded die-cast with black buttons, nuts and saddles are bone, and the X-bracing underneath the tops is hand-scalloped.

Pickup duties are carried out by Fishman with its tried-and-trusted Sonicore/Sonitone combo, with the controls – volume and tone – secreted away inside the soundhole. So, for around the $1,000 mark, you're getting all-solid woods, stage readiness, Cort's renown for high-spec construction plus a rather nice padded gigbag. Sounds like a bargain to us. But let's take a closer look at what we can expect from the array of body woods on offer here.

We'll look at mahogany first. All-mahogany body construction is far from being a new thing as many manufacturers, notably Martin, have been championing this particular configuration for many years. As a tonewood, it's an all-rounder with a reputation for midrange punch that responds well to a variety of picking styles and is a sonic favourite among blues players in particular.

Fingerstyle players might choose a smaller body size for a little more focus and to take advantage of the warmth and roundness that come from sensitive playing. Bold strummers would opt for a dreadnought for sheer power and mahogany's blooming harmonics when played hard. Seeing as the OM body size is neither small nor particularly large, it's a fair bet to say that the Core Mahogany could prove to have a foot in both camps and end up being something of an everyman instrument. We'll see in a little while.

Meanwhile, our next contender is Cort's spruce/mahogany combo. As far as traditional acoustic guitar making goes, you'd be hard stretched to find a more common woody cocktail on an acoustic guitar. The only other partnership that comes close would be spruce and rosewood, so Cort is definitely onto a winner here for ears that are used to hearing classic acoustic guitar sounds.

Given what we've already said about mahogany's midrange clout, pairing it with Sitka spruce has become something of a standard in modern acoustic manufacturing. Sitka is a luthier's favourite because, apart from being easy to work with, it has a broad dynamic range and great projection and volume. In short, it's a punchy little number that ranks very high on the list of highly desirable timber in even the most expensive bespoke instruments.

Third in line is blackwood. Now we'll say straight off the bat that although we're familiar with the charms of this particular tonewood, we've never come across it as a top wood before. Cort doesn't say in its spec where this particular blackwood hails from, but it's generally accepted that the king of the crop comes from Africa, although Tasmanian, Australian and Indian blackwood has lumbered onto our radar in the past.

Despite its name, African blackwood is actually a rosewood and got its name because of its deep, rich black hue. The other variants don't share the same genus designation. The African variety is an amazingly resonant, dense and heavy wood and sits between the thrones of the other regal tonewoods such as Brazilian rosewood and mahogany in terms of sound output.

African blackwood is getting harder to find and so our suspicion here is that we're dealing with a blackwood that's – how shall we put it? – not of noble birth. All will be revealed when we begin to audition this very handsome trio...

In terms of feel there is very little to separate the three; the build is almost exactly the same across the board. There is a slight difference in weight, but we only know that because we weighed each of them for the spec check at the end of this review! It's doubtful that anyone would be able to detect the fractional difference in this respect. In any case, we'd probably fail a blindfold test if the only criteria were weight and general feel.

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As we've mentioned, the workmanship that we've seen recently from Cort has been top notch, and the same is true here. Even under the close scrutiny that accompanies these reviews, we couldn't find a hair out of place. But you want us to address the elephant in the room and tell you how they sound, don't you? Fear not, the wait is over.

In no particular order, the blackwood variant

## ▶ VERDICT

All-solid woods, amazing build quality, stage-ready plus a very nice gigbag thrown in? These models really are a no-brainer.

## ▶ PROS

- Splendid builds.
- Mahogany model is good and punchy acoustically.
- It's louder than the others when amplified.
- Spruce model offers great value traditional OM sounds.

## ▶ CONS

- Mahogany model is a little midrange heavy when plugged in.
- The Spruce's Trans Black finish might put the purists off.

## ▶ CONTACT

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is a belter. Loud and suitably proud, it has a good, full midrange and a rounded bottom-end. Trebles are well represented, too, and both fingerstyle and played with a pick it packs quite a sophisticated wallop.

Next in line is the spruce/mahogany combo and it's everything you'd expect from such a traditional marriage of bodywoods. It has sweetness and power in all the accustomed places with an airy but punchy bass so typical of the OM. Lastly, the all-mahogany version plays true to form with a very slightly warmer edge than its siblings and plenty of good, throaty grunt when picked hard. Bluesers will love it.

Through our well-travelled AER Compact 60 each of the Corts took its tonal stamp into the amplified domain, and – with the same settings on the amp – the mahogany was the loudest of the three on test, the spruce top performed to character with everything you'd hope to hear from a spruce/mahogany OM, and the blackwood was the most anonymous, tonally speaking. Which is not a bad thing, necessarily – just think of it as being more of a road less travelled.

If a victor has to be declared then, for us at least, the spruce top hops onto the winner's podium. Whether this is because it satisfies all the tonal expectations of a more traditional OM is hard to say, but it just seems to nudge past the post as an all-rounder.

# Blackstar Dept. 10 Dual Drive and Dual Distortion

A TRULY EXPANDED VALVE PREAMP EXPERIENCE IN A PEDAL? REVIEW BY **ROB LAING**.

**RRP: $579**

Valve preamp pedals are not a new concept – and Blackstar should know. It was there at the vanguard with its HT range back in the year of its launch in 2007. The company's late co-founder and technical director Bruce Keir playing a key role in the design and development of pedals that harnessed valve technology in a compact, floor-based enclosure. It's a testament to his legacy that the company has named its new range after the team tasked with continuing the innovative work Keir helped start; Department 10.

The elephant in the room is that the appeal of valve preamp pedals has been relatively niche in the guitar world. Perhaps because so few have been truly valve-driven like these pedals are. While the development and popularity of digital effects and boutique overdrives have exploded, along with cab and amp modelling units. But are the stakes getting higher? Floor-based amps are on the rise; both digital and analogue. Flexibility and mobility for guitar rigs are more important than ever and these kind of units can deliver practice, recording and gigging solutions without a traditional 'amp' in sight. Blackstar might have timed their return to the format perfectly.

We know from the last 14 years that Blackstar can deliver world class valve-based amplification, but here they're pairing that engineering reputation with their more recently developed cab modelling technology. The Dept 10 Dual Drive and Dual Distortion represents a meeting of those worlds; each running at more than 200V internally like a full valve amp and packing an ECC83 triode, and yet powered by a 9V power supply. Both offer three crunch and overdrive voices alongside clean, across two switchable channels. Alongside an effects loop and an XLR-out and USB, players can choose one of two outputs depending on whether they want to use the Cab Sim technology or bypass it. There's huge potential here.

In a market of good looking pedals, these are classy and sleek; matte finish on aluminium casing with clear controls. A curved bar protects the valve within and under it is the small switch to choose between three onboard Cab Rig DI presets. These can be refined and uploaded via Blackstar's Architect software.

We tested both pedals as part of a pedalboard using the effects loop through a solid state combo's clean channel, but also into a full range, flat response powered cab and recording directly with a DAW via an interface. That says a lot about the versatility these pedals offer out of the box.

Though it's accurate to describe the Dual Overdrive as an all-rounder and the Dual Distortion delivering for heavier needs, it undersells the wide range of gain tones both deliver. The DO can do heavy on the second channel and there's some hugely satisfying lighter crunch tones to be had from the DD's Channel 1 Crunch voice.

Blackstar have given you some effective, user-friendly tools to control your gain. The Infinite Shape Feature control will be familiar to existing Blackstar owners; a single knob that shifts between the extremes of a UK and American-style amp sound. This directly affects the frequency peak of the mid control. We found the independent gain and levels were relatively simple to balance when it comes to crunch and distortion.

The sheer range of gain and dynamic response here may put your existing drive pedals on notice; a great showcase of Blackstar to newcomers and a highly usable gain station for players. Both pedals are a timely reminder that there is something special about quality valve-driven gain when it comes to clarity and definition for our guitar sounds.

The Dual Distortion is the one more likely to turn heads; it can do huge scooped slabs of metal, searing lead and tight percussive chunk on Channel 2. But for the classic side of rock, it will be simply too spicy in the gain department for some so the Dual Overdrive offers Swiss Army Knife musicality. Consider your needs and choose accordingly.

We're pleased to report how well both perform at home levels and placing all the control on your pedalboard encourages a hands-on approach to tweaking. But it's the Cab Rig DI features that makes the asking price here an especially sweet spot. Both pedals sound at their brightest and most harmonically detailed when using Blackstar's onboard Cab Rig technology. There are three onboard models to switch between and the ability to edit and upload your own with a huge range of parameters – from virtual power amp valves to mics, room character and EQ – thanks to the company's Architect software.

Both of these units are a showcase of valve technology and modelling working together as a versatile solution for players, with a superb range of valve tones that we found transferred equally well to stage and studio.

## ▶ VERDICT

Blackstar have delivered a world class and accessible package here. For usability, value and quality of tones, these are two of the best gear releases of 2021.

## ▶ PROS

- Effective, user-friendly tools to control your gain.
- Dual Overdrive offers Swiss Army Knife musicality.
- Cab Rig has three onboard models to switch between.

## ▶ CONS

- None.

## ▶ CONTACT

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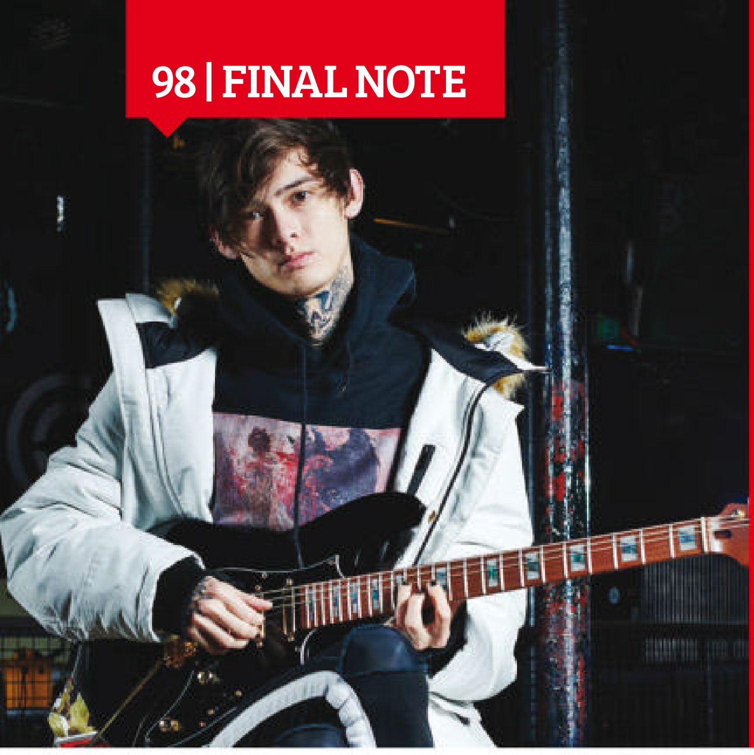

# WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT BOOMER BENDS

IN 2019, **POLYPHIA** AXEMAN **TIM HENSON** MADE COMMENTS ABOUT AVOIDING "BOOMER-ISH" BENDS, SPARKING A REACTION THAT SPEAKS TO LARGER ISSUES FOR US GUITAR PLAYERS, AND HOW OUR TREATMENT OF THE PAST SHAPES THE FUTURE OF THE INSTRUMENT. THE BACKLASH TO HENSON'S PREFERENCE REPRESENTS MORE THAN JUST A GENERATIONAL DIVIDE.

WORDS BY **MATT PARKER**.

Polyphia guitarist Tim Henson once made the mistake of voicing a personal preference in a video on the internet. The throwaway comment on how he likes to avoid "boomer-ish" bends occupied roughly ten seconds of a 40-minute roundtable entitled The Modern Guitar Discussion. Given this context – or, frankly, any context – it was a perfectly reasonable statement to make. Not least because host Rick Beato had invited Henson on alongside fellow contemporary guitar titans Tosin Abasi and Misha Mansoor, to discuss exactly this sort of thing.

But, of course, half the internet interpreted Henson's comment as nothing less than a threat to their very existence. It was as if Henson had stood on his chair and made a rallying call to eradicate not just 'boomer bends', but an entire generation and, indeed, capitalism, comfortable insoles and Star Wars.

For many players, myself included, the backlash was infuriating – particularly the underlying tone that Henson somehow didn't know what he was talking about. As if a successful 27 year-old guitarist is not capable of deciding their own tastes and playing their own music. It implied that he should learn to just 'do it the old way'. In reality, Henson is the one who has the perspective. He never said he didn't like the music. He just views the increasingly watered-down blues of the 'boomer bend' as one of many techniques, something evocative of a particular era.

Thankfully, many viewers took it in good humour, confessing their own addiction to 'boomer bends' or laughing at Henson's throw-away skewering. As someone sandwiched between the two warring generations of Boomers and Gen Z, I have to say that when I heard the term I was glad.

Firstly – like Beato – it made me laugh, because in Henson's concept of "boomer-ish" bends, he perfectly encapsulated and dismissed 60 years of lazy guitar tropes. My job is writing for guitar and music-making publications, and I have used many more words to say much less. Secondly, it prodded me to question my own playing – which frequently defaults into blues-rock clichés – and, thirdly, it convinced me that this conversation is long overdue.

The fact is that 'boomer bends' are overused. Yes, it's all part of a broader cycle, but that side of guitar playing isn't getting any younger. Retro-fetishists can claim to update classic rock all they like, but with a few exceptions, it's mostly more of the same. The innovations are small, the returns of that cycle of self-consumption diminishing.

Henson, by contrast, is currently in the ascendance: an innovative guitarist who is inspiring new players. He is finding ways to keep the guitar relevant in a landscape of astonishingly broad listening habits and rich learning resources. He's not the only one, either. More than ever before, younger players from more diverse backgrounds are seizing guitars at such a rate that guitar makers can't keep up with the demand.

The criticism of Henson speaks to a much larger issue we have in the guitar-playing world, which is that the past has somehow become sacred and unquestionable. Musicians have always looked back to learn, but something bigger has happened across the past few decades. We have, collectively, rebuilt the entire industry around nostalgia. You can see why this has happened. The guitar was the first truly democratising force in popular music. Just as rock 'n' roll radio found new ears across the country, the guitar arrived and rescued music-loving kids from the formality of parlor gatherings and family piano recitals.

Hand-in-hand, the electric guitar and rock music arrived to take teenagers out of the house and into the garage, venue and, eventually, a big, muddy field in the name of peace and love and progress. The artists that wielded those guitars had long-lasting impacts on society. People shaped their lives around those messages. But what was once the counter-culture has aged into the dominant culture. And now the instruments that built it are kept under glass.

What started as an occasional record reissue has turned into a rolling classic album tour circuit, going through the motions. In the guitar industry, the vintage obsession – still powered by that dream of the '60s blues rock icons – occupies more and more of our headspace, trade shows and collections. As a community, we build and rebuild the same boxes, investing ever-increasing hours and dollars in pursuit of sounds that have already been made. Guitar land has, somehow, developed an unquestioning belief that old ideas are good, new ideas are bad.

It's the same on the playing side. We play the same licks, on the same gear and we say things like, "I'm really more of a feel player..." with a straight face, as if any guitarist, anywhere, has ever played the instrument to not express themselves. In effect, the 'boomer bends' backlash is telling players like Henson to carry on letting guitar music consume itself. To say to a contingent of younger players – who can see all this happening and think, on balance, they don't need to add to it – "You should do this, too."

The guitarist, more than any other musician, is prone to believing that we need a certain combination of expensive and magical trinkets to achieve our dreams, and that the playing of a certain era cannot be bettered; that a small group of predominantly white, predominantly male, predominantly heterosexual players solved the problems of mankind.

This is how history works: the rough path is beaten smooth by the footfall. Where this process gets harmful – in cultural matters and wider society – is when we stop questioning it. When we stop looking for a new way. Henson is by no means the first player to decide he doesn't want to play the same things his parents did, or even choose to avoid the 'boomer bend'. There's a long line of superb guitar players who have already made that decision: Johnny Marr, The Edge, Robin Guthrie, Jonny Greenwood, the aforementioned Mansoor and Abasi.

It should also be said that 'boomer bends' sound great in the right hands, too. However, it's just one idea of many. The guitar has thrived because of its flexibility. Successive generations have used it to take a buzzsaw to the rulebooks of their predecessors. But it's getting harder to cut through – and we can do without the enforcement from punishers on the internet.

The great failure of the those perpetuating the 'boomer bends' backlash is that they have missed the lessons of their own icons. Those who had a relentless desire to move forward, to a better place, to move on from painful pasts. A rolling stone gathers no moss. Don't look back. Rip it up and start again. Stand up next to a mountain and chop it down with the edge of your hand.

For most of us, the watered-down 'boomer bend' is no longer a tool for revolution. It has become a crutch – one that's led to a long and unquestioned proliferation of boring, predictable music: playing that says nothing about the player. I enjoyed Henson's off-hand take because I find the idea that we can tie-up 'boomer bends' and toss them in the fire to be liberating. I see it as a fresh start, a blank page on which legions of new players can start to make their own marks.

"I fully expect that one day people will be making the same jokes about my playing – slaying insults, generationally," Henson told Beato, when they discussed the fallout. "I welcome it with open arms. We'll keep doing it from generation to generation."

For the guitar to survive, we must.

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